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The official journal of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) — is one of the world's leading journals devoted to the academic study of religions. It covers the full breadth of current international scholarship in the field, featuring articles on contemporary religious phenomena as well as on historical themes, theoretical contributions besides more empirically oriented studies. In all areas of religious studies *NUMEN* publishes articles, book reviews, review articles, and survey articles.

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Challenging Definitions: Human Agency, Diverse Religious Practices and the Problems of Boundaries¹

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Abstract

Much contemporary scholarship in Religious Studies emphasizes communities who contest the standard definitions of their religion. However, religious labels and terms such as syncretism often implicitly validate the dominant definitions that identify these diverse practices as peripheral. This essay explores the challenges that the dominant definitions present to such communities and suggests an emphasis on agency and the contestation surrounding any definition of a religion to avoid privileging one definition of a religion and, thereby, to facilitate a more balanced analysis. The example of Sindhi Hindus illustrates the value of this emphasis on agency. Sindhi Hindu communities and individuals construct and defend their own definitions of religions in environments where non-Sindhis challenge Sindhi practices, which do not necessarily correspond exactly to the definitions that the Sindhis construct for themselves. Adding Bell's conception of ritual inscription to this discussion of agency further highlights how participation in practices commonly associated with different religions can foster internal tensions. Therefore, an emphasis on agency with its complexity and limitations enables scholars to recognize the internal pressures that exist in some constructions of religious practices without contributing to the external challenge from dominant definitions. This approach also enables a

¹ The research on Sindhi Hindus comes from my fieldwork in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, with the support of a dissertation fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies, and fieldwork among Sindhi Hindus in Atlanta, Georgia. The names and some identifying features of interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy. This article is a revision of a presentation that I made at The University of Alabama 27 January 2006. I appreciate the comments and suggestions of my colleagues in Alabama's Department of Religious Studies, specifically Russell McCutcheon, Steven Jacobs, Maha Marouan, and Tim Murphy.

more nuanced analysis of processes of syncretism that are more complex than traditional applications of that term allow.

Keywords

Hindu, Sikh, Sufi, Sindhi, religious boundaries, agency, definitions, syncretism, hybridity, gurdwara, Guru Granth Shahib

To foster spiritual development, Sufi Sant Dr. Rochal Das, a disciple of a Muslim Sufi master, advised a group of Sindhi Hindus in Lucknow, India, to install the Guru Granth Sahib in their community center. Although the combination of a Sufi disciple, Hindus, and the Guru Granth Sahib defies common expectations of religious boundaries, this community followed his suggestion, establishing a small room for the Guru Granth Sahib, complete with a canopy honoring the text. They called it the Harmandir, thus connecting it with the Harmandir (Golden Temple) in Amritsar, Punjab, a central Sikh shrine. Over the next few decades, this little room became a focal point for the Sindhi community in Lucknow, particularly as a site for Sindhi festivals.

Rochal Das himself was a Sindhi Hindu who worshipped a variety of deities and studied texts such as the Bhagavad Gita, yet he was also a disciple of Qutab Ali Shah, a Sindhi Muslim who accepted disciples without requiring them to convert to Islam. Qutab Ali Shah also practiced yoga and listened to readings from Hindu texts as well as following traditions commonly associated with Islam.² As Rochal Das, Qutab Ali Shah, and the Sindhi community in Lucknow illustrate, some Sindhis did not recognize the standard boundaries dividing Islamic, Hindu, and Sikh traditions and thereby implicitly challenged traditional definitions of those religions.

The expression of Sindhi traditions through the Harmandir in Lucknow, which began in 1954, was a part of the process of re-creating a Sindhi cultural heritage in a context of migration. As Sindh became a part of Pakistan following the Partition of South Asia in 1947, Hindus in the region became increasingly uncomfortable about their status in the majority Muslim country. As most Hindus migrated to India in the years

² Gajwani 2000:7–49.

following Partition, they left significant assets in Sindh, and they struggled to restore their economic resources, as well as their cultural and religious lives, in their new homes. The painful irony in this story of loss and migration is that other Hindus in India questioned the Hindu identification of the Sindhis after their migration, even though their Hindu identification was the basis for that migration. The challenges that Sindhi Hindus have faced, which arose from the discrepancy between the dominant definitions of Hinduism and the varied practices of Sindhi Hindus, create additional challenges for scholars in Religious Studies.

Definitions Challenging Communities

Sindhi Hindus are only one of many groups who defy the dominant understandings of the boundaries of religions. Much recent scholarship has highlighted the struggles of communities whose practices challenge the traditional definitions.³ Such studies generally draw on the analyses in post-colonial scholarship of the development of essentialized definitions in the colonial period, despite the complexity of practices and community inter-relations.⁴ While the legal, social, and political impact of dominant definitions has become clear, these various studies and critiques sometimes implicitly reinforce the dominant definitions as the language and forms available for describing religious traditions and communities typically imply the dominant understandings.

Labeling the *Guru Granth Sahib* as a Sikh text or Sufism as Islamic implicitly accepts one general definition that, often uncritically, excludes alternative understandings. For example, such labeling dismisses as aberrant the Sindhi Hindus who argue that the *Guru Granth Sahib* is a Hindu text and the Muslims who label Sufism as un-Islamic. When scholars use the labels without placing them in a context that involves significant contestation, this validation of particular definitions ultimately places scholars of religion in the position of accepting and rejecting various statements of faith. While some people may accept that theological authority, many scholars want to avoid making such assertions.

³ See, for example, Fleuckiger 2006; Dean 1998; Mayaram 1997; Bowman 1993.

⁴ A few examples focusing on India are Pandey 1992; Freitag 1989; Kenneth Jones 1981.

Using terms such as syncretism and hybridity to label these practices that diverge from traditional definitions has similar problems. Historically these terms have implied the acceptance of a particular understanding of a religion as the original or trans-historical form that then undergoes change in contact with other traditions.⁵ Several scholars have attempted to rehabilitate syncretism by adding the issue of power to the analysis of traditions described as syncretic and contrasting a strategy of “blending” to a strategy of “boundary maintenance.”⁶ Viewing syncretism and anti-syncretism as processes of power is valid when movements consciously combine diverse elements, but the issue remains complex. The idea of “blending” does not reflect the views of communities, such as the Sindhi Hindus, when they assert that their practices are not blended. The dominant understanding among Sindhi Hindus argues that their practices represent the full, historic form of Hinduism, not a blend of different religions. As I will demonstrate later, though, syncretism as a process of blending fits with the representations of Sindhi Hindus in some diasporic situations.

The impact of such disputes over religious definitions stretch beyond the judgments of neighbors, co-workers, and even scholars. In relation to Sindhi Hindus, the Partition of South Asia followed particular understandings of leaders and governmental bureaucrats as to who qualified as Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, etc. Like many governmental bodies, the secular governments of India have also defined the boundaries of Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam in specific ways that have, in some circumstances, placed Sindhi Hindus outside the recognized Hindu community. Concerns over potential legal challenges based on definitions of Hinduism and their experiences of marginalization have encouraged some Sindhi Hindus to change their practices in order to conform to mainstream definitions.

Beyond these external pressures, the dominant definitions produce more subtle challenges. While many Sindhi Hindus challenge their marginalization with the defensive assertion, “We are Hindu!” and proceed to contest the dominant definitions, the influence of the dominant definitions on language impacts their self-representations in ways similar

⁵ A concise overview of this critique of syncretism is Ernst and Stewart 2003.

⁶ Kraft 2002:149; Droogers 1989:226.

to the discussion of labels above. Sindhi Hindu statements concerning religious issues often shift between their own understandings of the relations of Hindu, Sikh, and Islamic traditions and the dominant definitions of those traditions, which then implicitly contradict their own previous assertions.

In terms of practices, these experiences of migration and marginalization have created other unique dynamics for Sindhis. Reflecting aspects of their heritage, many Sindhi Hindus participate in a range of ritualized activities, associating with both Sindhi and non-Sindhi institutions. As such participation inscribes differing ritual schemes onto Sindhi Hindus, it immerses them in contradictions that further challenge Sindhi Hindu definitions of religions. These individual and community-wide challenges, which stem from the dominance of a particular definition of these religions, illustrate well the power of definitions to impact people's lives.

Recognizing Human Agency

Emphasizing the agency of all human beings, both in collective groups and as individuals, presents one corrective to the implicit acceptance of dominant definitions of religious traditions. As the significance of human agency has gained currency in sociological and historical studies, among other areas,⁷ the implications for Religious Studies need further development. Recognizing agency challenges the validity of any single definition of a religious tradition. Each person, whether a scholar, religious leader, or layperson, and each collective group have the ability to develop their own definition of what is included and excluded in each religious tradition.

As Ronald Inden has delineated, agency is a complex factor, because neither individuals nor groups have a monolithic conception or purpose about which they express agency.⁸ Multiple agendas exist within any community, and individuals have multiple layers of concerns and interests that make even their assertions shifting and sometimes contradictory. Moreover, while groups and individuals can act as agents, they do not

⁷ Sewell 1992; Inden 1990.

⁸ Inden 1990:23–25.

always operate in that manner. Sometimes a person or group is an instrument of another or simply a patient, being acted upon.⁹ With this complexity, it is clear that respecting agency is not a simple matter; however, its contributions to our analysis of varied religious traditions are significant.

When the statements of groups and individuals are recognized as assertions of valid agents, rather than dismissed for not conforming to the dominant view, the contestation surrounding these definitions becomes obvious. Respecting agency, however, does not mean the uncritical acceptance of any definition. It shifts the focus from accounting for the non-traditional definitions or practices to questioning the ideological issues and other factors that influence the various definitions, no matter how old or popular an understanding of religious boundaries is. This emphasis also treats each ideological assertion as the construction of a particular agent in an historical context, thus encouraging an evaluation of change over time in these assertions.

The concept of individual and group agency extends beyond issues of definition and boundaries to the development of lived religious practices. While a community presents a particular definition of their religion, the practices within that same community may not correspond exactly to the definition. Every community emphasizes certain practices while neglecting or downplaying others, reflecting the negotiation between different interests and needs of participants as well as the opportunities and limitations of the larger social and geographical context. Moreover, the ideological statements of the community, in some cases, shift to justify changes in lived religious practices. Because the definitions and the practice influence each other without necessarily corresponding exactly, the process of constructing practices needs to be distinguished from the ideological arguments over the issue of boundaries.

This process of asymmetrical development between definitions and practices is even more clearly evident on the individual level. Many members of a community effectively participate in a varied group of religious practices and ideas, accepting some aspects of the dominant practices and ideas of their group and combining them with ideas and practices from other groups or traditions. Rather than dismissing such constructions as

⁹ Ibid.

individual aberrations, the focus on agency encourages the analysis of the factors impacting the individual constructions, such as religious conviction, convenience of one institution over another, nostalgia, and inexplicable happenstance. Because an emphasis on agency recognizes the ability of groups and individuals to create both definitions and practices, it facilitates the analysis of the differences between ideological definitions and lived practices as well as the justifications and circumstances of those differences.

These lines of inquiry, both on the community and the individual levels, place religion within a broader historical and cultural context. Religion should not be isolated from other aspects of human experience, such as social forces, economic concerns, and legal impositions, that impact the formation of particular definitions. Moreover, a full investigation of religious traditions must also recognize that other components of human experience influence the boundaries of religions. In fact, these other components may be of primary importance in these practices and understandings, overshadowing the importance of religion. As the example of Sindhi Hindus will further illustrate, in diasporic situations, the practices and ideological statements may reflect nostalgia for the homeland and/or ethnic or national identities more than religious sentiments for some participants.

In relation to this emphasis on agency and the contestation surrounding religions, some scholars have expressed concerns that, without an authority that maintains a general unity within a religion's diversity, each religion becomes a momentary whim of the individual.¹⁰ While on one level a focus on agency questions any universalizing promotion of even a general essence or definition for a religion, whether from the theologians in a tradition or scholars, this approach does not necessarily result in "unbridled pluralism [that] leads to a philosophical dead end."¹¹ Instead, it shifts our attention away from philosophical unity towards the enactment of unity. Sindhi Hindus demonstrate this alternative, as the end result of their agency is not an atomized existence. They express their agency, at times, in community practices and the collective development of institutions such as the Hari Om Mandir. Moreover, they express a

¹⁰ See, for example, Smith 2000; Neusner 1995.

¹¹ Smith 2000:745.

sense of collective identification, at times as Sindhis, Sindhi Hindus, or simply Hindus. A focus on agency, and the alternative vision of syncretism that comes out of it, presents a varied sense of essences, depending on who constructs the definition and how it is practiced. At the same time, it avoids the enforcement of a philosophical unity that devalues contestation and dismisses minority communities as aberrant.

Challenges to and from Sindhi Hindus

The dominant definitions of Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam, both within contemporary India and introductory understandings in Religious Studies, assumes three distinct traditions whose main practices exclude the others. While contestation exists in India within each community as to what elements are most important to include, these dominant understandings suggest that Sindhi Hindus draw on elements from three distinct traditions. As Sindhi Hindus identify themselves as Hindu, worship deities such as Lakshmi and Ganesh, and respect the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita, they clearly draw on elements that fall within the dominant boundaries of Hinduism. However, their installation of the Guru Granth Sahib and veneration of Guru Nanak, according to the dominant definitions, belong to a separate religion labeled Sikhism. Moreover, their veneration of Sufis, such as Rochal Das and his pir Qutab Ali Shah, crosses the assumed boundary between Islam and Hinduism.

The dominant definitions that associate Sindhi practices with three distinct traditions have not always been dominant in India. Their histories clearly illustrate the contestation that arises in any context with a variety of agents working from their own perspectives and concerns. The history of the terms Hindu and Hinduism arouse significant scholarly debate. While some scholars argue that Hinduism as a religion is the construction of Orientalists, others contest that interpretation, emphasizing the religious aspects of Hindu identity prior to the British.¹² While it is commonly accepted that the term “Hinduism” was first coined in the colonial context of the early nineteenth century, the use of the term “Hindu” has been ambiguous since before the colonial period, as it could

¹² For examples of these debates, see Lorenzen 1999; Dalmia 1997; Pandey 1992.

refer to religious, cultural, and/or geographical identifications.¹³ Although these historical ambiguities, which largely revolve around the slippery issue of distinguishing between ethnic and religious identifications, are beyond the scope of this paper, they demonstrate clearly that the assertion of a trans-historical definition for Hinduism is a gross oversimplification.

Beyond the historical development of the term “Hindu,” disputes between different understandings of Hinduism also abound. The veneration and protection of cows, for example, is an element that many Hindus, including Mohandas K. Gandhi, have identified as central to Hinduism and that many overviews of Hinduism within Religious Studies repeat. However, the Second World Hindu Conference in 1979, among other groups, left the veneration of cows out of its main list of elements in Hinduism,¹⁴ and others have argued that the veneration of the cow was not an ancient Vedic practice.¹⁵

In a similar way, the designation of Sikhism as a religion completely distinct from Hinduism also arose within a particular historical context. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, two understandings of Sikh boundaries vied for dominance. The Khalsa Sikh understanding, which became dominant, suggested that Sikhs are a completely separate tradition and that any combination of Sikhism with Hinduism, such as installing Hindu deities in Sikh gurdwaras, corrupts the tradition. The previously dominant understanding, however, asserted that Sikhism is a part of the broad Hindu tradition and does not preclude the worship of Hindu deities along with the veneration of the Sikh gurus. Not simply an esoteric religious debate, the context of this dispute centered on issues of political and religious power. Using their definition of Sikhism, Khalsa Sikhs succeeded in taking control of gurdwaras from their hereditary managers, who permitted images of deities along with the Guru Granth Sahib. Some Sikhs also opposed the enumeration of Sikhs as Hindus in the Indian Census, which clearly impacted the allocation of seats in representative bodies during the British Raj.¹⁶

¹³ Sharma 2002:20.

¹⁴ Michaels 1997:79–81.

¹⁵ Jha 2002.

¹⁶ Oberoi 1994; Kenneth Jones 1981.

While few question a clear divide between Islam and Hinduism in general, even though Hindus and Muslims frequently participate in each other's ritualized activities, questions about the relation of Sufism to Islam and Hinduism are common. As Sufis have conflicted historically with legal scholars in Islam over the Sufi emphasis on union with the divine, some Muslims place Sufism outside of Islam. Some Sufis have also rejected the limitation of Sufism to one religion, seeing it as a universal spiritual practice. Within India, a few Hindus, mostly Hindu Nationalists, have argued that Sufism developed out of Hindu influence on Islam, or at times directly out of Hinduism, making Sufism an indigenous tradition or offshoot of Hinduism that is separate from Islam. While some contest the inclusion of Sufism within Islam, Sufis in India are typically associated with Islam, as the symbols associated with Sufi sites, including adjoining mosques, green flags, and Arabic calligraphy, demonstrate. While contestation abounds over the definition of all three traditions, functionally the dominant definition in India identifies Sufi saints and the Guru Granth Sahib as outside of the boundaries of Hinduism.

Among Sindhi Hindus the dominant, though not universal, understanding of the relationships of these three traditions was quite different from the understandings generally dominant in India. Some Sindhi Hindus relied on a Hindu monistic philosophy to argue that boundaries were insignificant since everything was ultimately one. While this argument supports recognizing their practices as syncretic, many presented much more specific arguments relating to both Sikh and Sufi traditions that make the term syncretism inappropriate according to their understandings. For example, many Sindhi Hindus asserted that Sikhism is a subset of Hindu traditions; therefore, the Guru Granth Sahib is ultimately a Hindu text, not just the domain of the Sikh subgroup of Hinduism. In this argument, they restated the understanding that lost out in the historical debates surrounding Sikhism. Many times they asserted that the gurus in the Sikh lineage were Hindus, while some asserted that the designation of Sikhism as a separate religion was an innovation from fanatical Sikhs who, by implication, were outside mainstream Sikhism. They further bolstered their arguments by highlighting the various references to Hindu deities in the Guru Granth Sahib.

Sindhi Hindus presented very different assertions in relation to Sufism. In defining Sufism as a deep devotion to the divine that extends beyond

any particular religious tradition, many Sindhis suggested that Sufism incorporates anyone who is a lover of the divine. Chandu Ram, a Sindhi Hindu guru in Lucknow, for example, referred to Hinduism as Sanatan Dharm (Eternal Religion) and then described himself and his followers as being “Sufi in a Sanatan way.” Many Sindhi Hindus presented a different argument, connecting Sufism with Islam explicitly or implicitly. Rochal Das, for example, used Arabic terms to describe many of his spiritual practices and venerated Sufis who specifically identified as Muslim.¹⁷ Rochal Das’s son and successor equated Arabic terms from Sufism and Sanskrit terms in Vedanta as he argued that Sufism and Vedanta are essentially the same; their differences are merely an issue of semantics.¹⁸ Various Sindhis brought these different ideas together, connecting Sufism with Islam historically but seeing it extend beyond Islam to include lovers of God from any religious tradition.

This understanding of Sufism complicated the self-representations of Sindhis. Some Sindhis identified themselves as Sufis without any qualification, while the same people, on other occasions, identified themselves as Hindus. Relying on the dominant definitions without recognizing the agency of Sindhis to contest those definitions makes such a shifting identification perplexing. However, by recognizing the agency of Sindhi Hindus to assert their own understandings, it is possible to interpret such assertions not as conflicting identifications but as efforts, at times, to assert their loving devotion to the divine as Sufis that is consistent with their identification with Hindu traditions.

Sindhi History and the Challenge of Defining Community

Sindhi representations of their complex history reveal further efforts to justify their varied practices as well as the continuing impact of the dominant definitions. In part to support their identification as Hindus, they frequently identified their home region, the Indus Valley, as the cradle of Hindu civilization. They asserted that the Rg Veda was composed on the banks of the Sindhu River, now known as the Indus

¹⁷ In Hari 1995:302–12.

¹⁸ Hari 1982.

River, which gave its name to the region Sindh. They further emphasized how the terms Hindu and India both developed from the original name of the Sindhu River.

Despite their claims to connect with ancient Hinduism, Sindhi Hindus have existed on the periphery of the modern Hindu heartland. Living at the entrance-way for invasions from West Asia, for centuries the Hindu community in Sindh has been a minority, generally thriving under the rule of various Afghani, Persian, and Sindhi Muslims. Beyond the influence of Persia and the Muslim majority community, Sindhi Hindus frequently mentioned the connection of their region to the neighboring Punjab. Sindhi veneration of Nanak and the Guru Granth Sahib can be traced to the historical relationship between the neighboring regions as well as the travels through Sindh of Nanak and some of his followers.

Beyond these historical influences, many Sindhi Hindus present pre-Partition Sindh as a harmonious region of brotherhood between Hindus and Muslims, who even shared particular festivals. A common trope among Sindhi Hindus is the sorrow of Sindhi Muslims at the departure of their Hindu neighbors during Partition. The historiography of pre-Partition Sindh suggests that this harmony was certainly not universal, as the economic differences between urban Hindu traders and Muslim land-owners and peasants as well as political struggles for control of the region fostered strife that occasionally turned violent.¹⁹ Such tensions, while often identified as Hindu versus Muslim, had little to do with what is commonly seen as religion, as economic and political concerns appear to have been the primary motivations.

Whatever the historical reality, the image of Sindh that Sindhi Hindus promote encourages them to challenge the definition of communities that political powers employed at Partition. Their experiences of loss following Partition, economic loss as well as the loss of heritage and homeland, has fueled their frustration with those definitions. Sindhi Hindus specifically assert that Sindh was more complex than a simple designation as a Muslim majority area suggests. They continue to see their fellow Sindhi Muslims as distinct from Muslims in other parts of South Asia, especially the refugees who entered Karachi following Partition. Nevertheless,

¹⁹ Allen Jones 2002; Lari 1994:179–89.

governments identified these refugees as the same as Sindhi Muslims, who were distinct from Sindhi Hindus.

Instead of separating Sindhis according to Hindu and Muslim identities, many Sindhi Hindus believe that their regional identity was more significant than religious differences. One Sindhi Hindu who was particularly frustrated by Partition 55 years after the fact asserted,

[Sindhi Muslims] are only Muslim in name; fathers were Muslims. In fact, Sindhi Muslims are not fanatic. They are Sufi. If you go there, to Sindh, there are three or four places, permanent places, where Hindus and Muslims both worship there.... There are festivals, common festivals of Hindus and Muslims.

Beyond the problematic association of non-Sindhi Islam with fanaticism, he specifically emphasized that a regional connection is stronger than a religious connection. He thereby challenged the rationale for Partition in the Two Nation Theory, which associates all Muslims as one community opposed to the community of all Hindus.

Such historical frustrations demonstrate the importance of considering the complexity of agency. While all Sindhi Muslims did not feel as this person did, people can emphasize various identifications and motivations beyond religion, depending on the situation. Just as the complexity of Sindhi Hindu understandings of religious boundaries enables them to identify both as Hindus and as Sufis, some Sindhis express their agency by emphasizing the significance of regional connections with Sindhi Muslims over their connections to non-Sindhi Hindus. Such examples of the complicated layers of agency undermine any assumption that religious identifications are primary and that co-religionists automatically belong together.

Challenging the Harmandir

Based on this theoretical and historical background, it is possible to see the challenges that traditional definitions created for the specific community of Sindhi Hindus in Lucknow and the various choices that community leaders made in response to changing circumstances and community needs. As agents, their formation of an institution and ritualized activities was not limited to a specific group of practices,

from Sindhi traditions or the dominant understanding of Hinduism. They brought together the elements that they considered most significant or meaningful and continued to revise them according to their sense of the needs of their community in that specific context.

As the introduction demonstrates, the Harmandir began at the suggestion of Rochal Das, but the ways the community developed it emphasized their agency beyond being instruments of Rochal Das. Over the twenty years following Rochal Das's suggestion in 1954, community activities outgrew the small room where they enshrined the Guru Granth Sahib, leading the community to construct a separate building in the late 1970's, which they continued to identify as the Harmandir. The new structure contained a larger hall where they installed another copy of the Guru Granth Sahib as well as an auditorium and other facilities.

The standard definitions of religions in late twentieth century India, however, assumed that a Hindu institution should not have a Guru Granth Sahib because they belonged in different religions. To many non-Sindhis, this temple looked like a Sikh gurdwara that was illegitimately under Hindu control. In fact, with the increasing deterioration in Hindu-Sikh relations in the 1980's, Sindhis in Lucknow became concerned that Sikhs might attempt to take control of the Harmandir in Lucknow from them. While Sindhis in Lucknow did not discuss any physical attacks on their community, the community specifically became concerned that proposed legislation would place their Harmandir under the control of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC), which Khalsa Sikhs controlled. The Sikh agitations in the Punjab in the early 1980's had temporarily concluded with an accord between Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, and Harchand Singh Longowal, a leader of moderate Sikhs. The accord included Gandhi's promise to pass the All India Gurdwara Legislation that would place some gurdwaras throughout India under the control of the SGPC.

Although the bill never passed Parliament and its designation of which gurdwaras would be affected might have excluded the Harmandir in Lucknow,²⁰ the concerns of Sindhis in Lucknow were not entirely unjustified. A similar Sindhi institution in Karachi, Pakistan, is the subject of a legal fight. Someone has filed a case against the Sindhi management of the site,

²⁰ Singh 1991.

asserting that Hindus should not control a site containing a Guru Granth Sahib because they belong in different religions.²¹ This case provides a clear example in which the dominant definitions become the basis for a challenge to Sindhi practices.

In Lucknow, the management committee of the Harmandir amended their constitution in response to these concerns, changing the name of their site to Hari Om Mandir. This decision, according to the President of the temple at that time, involved “adding a Hindu touch” in the insertion of the Om in the name. The community made other changes to the structure of the Hari Om Mandir to emphasize their legitimacy as Hindus. Beside the Guru Granth Sahib, which sat in a canopy in the center of the main hall, the community added a copy of the Bhagavad Gita, which received similar treatment to the Guru Granth Sahib, such as being covered with brocaded cloth, fanned with a fly whisk, and being read during gatherings. The community also added several *murtis* (sculptures, lit., bodies) of deities in individual shrines, both along the side walls of the main hall and in the front courtyard. To clarify their identification, the community placed a three-foot brass Om on top of the canopy as the overarching unifier of the various elements in the main hall.

Such changes have continued. In 1999, the community installed *murtis* of six gurus/saints in the breezeway, including “Sufi Sant Dr. Rochal Das.” While members of the community variously identify these men as saints, Sufis, gurus, and holy men, they marked each shrine with an Om to clarify their identification. In 2002, artisans added a painted relief depicting Vishnu reclining on Seshna, a ten-headed cobra on the façade above the front courtyard. Its prominent position reflected Sindhi assertions that recognized Vishnu as the source for the appearance of various sacred figures, including Nanak and Jhule Lal, a specifically Sindhi deity, while its prominence from the street publicly emphasized the institution’s Hindu identification.

These various changes at the Harmandir/Hari Om Mandir reflect a continuing and complex process of development in the community. The definitions of Hinduism that members of this community assert incorporate all of the elements that the community has installed in the Hari Om Mandir, though the community has clearly chosen which deities and texts

²¹ “Goods Taken Away From Disputed Temple” 2005 and Chaudhry 2005.

to add out of the variety that fits within their definition of Hinduism. In one sense, the addition of the murtis, Bhagavad Gita, and various Oms add elements that fall within the dominant definition of Hinduism. These elements, therefore, suggest a movement towards mainstream Hinduism. Yet, that analysis does not explain the inclusion of one saint who is explicitly labeled as a Sufi. From another perspective, the incorporation of new elements more closely reflects the dominant understandings among Sindhis and the variety of practices that appear to have been significant in Sindh. This perspective suggests the importance of ethnic heritage in the process of selection. However, that suggestion does not explain all of the new elements, as some of the deities enshrined in the Hari Om Mandir, most notably Hanuman, are much more significant in contemporary Lucknow than they appear to have been in pre-Partition Sindh. These new elements, therefore, reflect the complexity of processes of developing practices that do not fall under a simple rational framework or reflect a pure ideological position.

Inscribing Sindhi Understandings

The layout of elements in the Hari Om Mandir, as the community in Lucknow developed it, established a clear hierarchy. Physically, the canopy containing the Guru Granth Sahib and the Bhagavad Gita was central in the main hall as the focus of the ritualized activities. The murtis of the deities along the side walls were clearly peripheral within the layout of the main hall, and the shrines honoring the various gurus/saints were in the breezeway, peripheral to the main hall itself.

The placement of each element reflected the attention given to them. The guru/saint shrines in the hallway received much less attention than the murtis in the main hall received. While devotees seldom paid obeisance to the gurus/saints, many devotees bowed before the murtis, and each murti shrine had a separate tray with a flame that a devotee waved before the shrine during arti. However, this treatment of the murtis did not compare to the devotion accorded the canopy. Almost every participant bowed before the canopy when entering the hall, even if that participant bowed before nothing else. It was very rare for someone to bow before the murti shrines without bowing before the canopy. Moreover,

during arti, most devotees lined up to take a turn waving the lamp before the canopy, while only a few devotees assisted in waving the lamps before the murtis.

While the texts in the canopy were central, the attention to those texts was not equal. The Bhagavad Gita received the same general treatment in terms of being read and covered with brocaded cloths, but the Guru Granth Sahib remained the primary source of sacred power in the community. The climax of the weekly gatherings was consistently the reading from the Guru Granth Sahib. During the preceding devotional music, many devotees and leaders moved around, preparing for the next element in the event, conducting temple business, and socializing. When the time came for the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, such activities typically ceased, and the devotees became particularly focused on the canopy. When the reading of the Guru Granth Sahib concluded and the reader slid over to begin reading from the Bhagavad Gita, the peripheral activities began again. Volunteers removed the food from under the Guru Granth Sahib and the flame from before the canopy to begin distributing both to the other devotees. These actions both reflected a decreased attentiveness to the central ritualized activities and demonstrated that the food and the flame attained spiritual power specifically from the Guru Granth Sahib, as they were removed as the reading of the Bhagavad Gita began. Similarly, many devotees offered brocaded cloths to the Guru Granth Sahib during special festivals and on personal occasions of thanksgiving. These cloths were then spread over the Guru Granth Sahib, but the Bhagavad Gita did not receive similar offerings. Clearly, the canopy remained central in the ritualized activities, but more importantly, the Guru Granth Sahib within the canopy remained the locus of sacred power in the temple.

The ritualized activities, therefore, established a clear hierarchy centered on the Guru Granth Sahib, with the Bhagavad Gita, deities, and gurus/saints holding positions of descending importance. With the large brass Om on the canopy visually subsuming all of these hierarchized elements into a Hindu identification, the ritualized activities at the Hari Om Mandir became an enactment of the dominant Sindhi definition of Hinduism while placing special emphasis on the Guru Granth Sahib as a central Hindu text. Participants at the Hari Om Mandir physically placed themselves within this ritual scheme and enacted the dominant Sindhi

understandings as they bowed before the canopy, sat on the floor facing the canopy, stood for the recitation of Ardas before the canopy, and received the flame and food that the Guru Granth Sahib had sanctified.

Drawing on Catherine Bell's analysis of ritual inscription and resistance, the significance of these ritual schemes becomes clear. Bell's work raises an interesting dialectic between the agency of the individual to resist ritual schemes and the impact of ritual inscription on the body despite that resistance.²² Participants at the Hari Om Mandir had the agency to resist the constructions of the world that the rituals reflected. Their participation did not automatically imply their acceptance of the ritual ideas. However, even if they resisted these conceptions, as they placed their bodies in physical relation to these sacred elements, their participation inscribed a particular understanding of the relationship of these objects onto their bodies. Bowing before the Guru Granth Sahib, which sat under a canopy topped with an Om, with various deities along the side walls and saints and gurus in the hallway, placed the devotee within that ritual hierarchy, therefore reinforcing the understanding that everything here was ultimately Hindu.

This sense of inscription was clearly different from what occurred prior to the changes beginning in 1985. Before that time, the Guru Granth Sahib was in the center, but the other elements were absent, reinforcing the special status of that text and, in some respects, the conception that Sikh traditions were distinct from other aspects of their Sindhi heritage. At that time, if a Sindhi wanted to express devotion to Hindu deities also, they had to visit other Hindu temples separately from their visit to the Hari Om Mandir. In this sense, the changes in 1985 were not simply a movement towards mainstream Hinduism but became a fuller expression of their Sindhi heritage, a heritage that also incorporated elements popular in Lucknow.

Individual Ritual Experiences

Considering these experiences on an individual level further demonstrates the challenge that the dominant definitions present to Sindhi

²² Bell 1992:94–98, 208–9.

Hindus and the analytical possibilities that a focus on agency provides. Even though the Hari Om Mandir, after the major changes of the 1980's, brings the different aspects of Sindhi traditions into one institution, individual Sindhi Hindus frequently participate in a variety of religious sites that draw on non-Sindhi traditions as well as specifically Sindhi sites.

To develop this analysis on the individual level, I will focus on the experiences of one person, whom I will identify as R.D. Gurnani. Gurnani, a retired mechanical engineer, was born in Sindh before Partition. He was a member of the managing committee at the Hari Om Mandir, but he also exemplified some of the selections and concerns of Sindhi Hindus more generally. In an interview, Gurnani explained to me that, in addition to attending occasional satsangs at the Hari Om Mandir, he regularly visited a large, north Indian Hanuman temple that was relatively close to his home and occasionally visited a Punjabi gurdwara in a nearby part of the city. He also visited the shrine of Nizam ad-din Chishti, a famous Sufi pir, in Delhi on multiple occasions.

Beyond these regular activities, I also asked him about rituals associated with marriage and death in his family, since life cycle rituals are often significant for expressing identity. Gurnani explained that, when his mother died, he had the Guru Granth Sahib brought from the gurdwara to perform a *path*, a ritualized reading of the Guru Granth Sahib, in this case occurring for thirteen days. He characterized his mother as following these things “too much,” which had encouraged him to continue those practices. In recalling his own wedding, he remembered having a path. Immediately after making that statement, he declared, “But at time of marriage we always have a havan. All Sindhis, ninety-five percent have havan.” As this statement shifted from the context of his own wedding to a general community statement, it was unclear whether he had both a path and a havan at his wedding or just a path. Based on his other representations, I understood this shift as a concern to represent the broader Sindhi Hindu community as being fully Hindu to an outsider more than an interest in highlighting a distinction between his family and the larger Sindhi community.

This shift also related to adjustments to his personal practices that reflected broader changes in the community. Despite continuing his mother's practices, he explained that he was in a transition stage because,

for marriages or the beginning of “some good work,” instead of a path he often hired a priest to conduct a havan, a ritual involving the recitation of Vedic slokas while offering herbs, ghee, and other elements into a fire. Despite this transition, Gurnani emphasized his effort to take his son and daughter-in-law to a Punjabi gurdwara to receive the blessings there after their marriage, which presumably involved a havan. In discussing his son, he also expressed some disappointment that he could not be assured that his son would perform a path at the time of Gurnani’s own passing rather than a havan. While Gurnani described his own transition, he maintained a clear emotional tie to the path and other blessings from the Guru Granth Sahib for certain occasions. The circumstances of the interview, which took place at the Hari Om Mandir during a children’s competition in honor of Nanak’s birthday, may have heightened his emotional connection to the Guru Granth Sahib, though that connection did not overpower the significance of havans.

Considering issues of individual agency enables better analysis of Gurnani’s practices and experiences. His personal practices included a Sindhi institution, a non-Sindhi Hindu temple, a Punjabi Sikh gurdwara, havans, path, and an occasional visit to a Muslim Sufi shrine. His implicit and explicit explanations of these traditions are significant. In a general sense, he emphasized the Punjabi influence on Sindhi traditions. According to Gurnani, in Sindh Nanak was most important, because Nanak came to Sindh to spread his teachings. The depth of this influence is waning in the context of Lucknow, however. Much like Gurnani’s statements about being in transition, he highlighted significant influence from the wider culture of Lucknow, especially for younger Sindhis who attend school with other Hindu students. These generational differences among Sindhi Hindus in Lucknow, which were clearly evident in his discussion of his own family’s dynamics, moved many Sindhis away from the Guru Granth Sahib and towards mainstream Hinduism.

Gurnani provided more specific explanations of his own group of practices and the experiences of Sindhi Hindus more generally. Sitting in the Hari Om Mandir, he explained his more regular attendance at a non-Sindhi Hindu temple and a Punjabi gurdwara as being a matter of convenience. He did not live close to the Hari Om Mandir, so he visited these other sites instead of attempting to traverse the congested metropolitan area. As a largely middle class minority, Sindhi Hindus are typically dis-

persed across metropolitan areas, making it difficult to congregate at any of the few Sindhi sites in Lucknow or other cities and preventing the insulation of these communities from non-Sindhi traditions. Gurnani's visits to Nizam ad-din Chishti's dargah had a somewhat similar preliminary explanation. These visits did not involve a specific pilgrimage to the shrine but were convenient side trips when he visited his in-laws. Even though the issue of convenience was significant, these assertions did not explain fully his choice of those sites, and he may have wanted to downplay the significance of his participation at other sites during an event at the Hari Om Mandir.

His practices also reflected a significant influence from his family's traditions. He explicitly emphasized his mother's focus on the gurdwara and the Guru Granth Sahib and its continuing influence on his own practices, including feelings of guilt for being in transition. Similarly, he explained his attraction to the Sufi site by relating his father's emphasis on Sufism. While Gurnani was growing up, his father continually recited under his breath the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif, one of the most famous Sufis of Sindh.

Convenience and family connections, however, do not explain sufficiently his visits to Nizam ad-din Chishti's dargah, as he never attempted to connect Nizam ad-din Chishti specifically to his father. Also, many Sufi shrines in Lucknow would obviously be much more convenient. Gurnani made a different distinction between Nizam ad-din and other Sufis, asserting that he visited and believed in only famous Sufi pirs who were accepted by people from many religions. He specifically excluded any of the Sufis in Lucknow, some of whom had significant multi-religious followings, from this group, apparently because they were not "famous" enough. His explanation specifically placed his relation to Sufis in the context of a tradition recognized by non-Sindhi Hindus, in contrast to the redefinitions of Sufism by some Sindhis.

Emphasizing Gurnani's agency highlights the varied explanations of his collection of practices. His regional heritage and aspects of family traditions played a significant role in his inclusion of these general elements, while issues of convenience were significant for his decision to visit particular sites over others. As statements made to a non-Sindhi in the context of celebrations at the Hari Om Mandir, these explanations did not necessarily reflect all the factors that influenced his participation at those

sites, but they presented a general picture of some of his concerns. In this situation, serious consideration of these practices and their connections without assuming that these practices are aberrant or need a philosophical unity to justify their inclusion provides a better understanding of this example of lived religious traditions.

This variety of practices influenced Gurnani and other Sindhi Hindus who participated in both Sindhi and non-Sindhi sites, regardless of the reasons for selection. Experiencing the ritual hierarchies embedded in the activities at Punjabi gurdwaras, non-Sindhi temples, and dargahs further immersed Gurnani in the dominant understandings of Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism as three separate traditions. Paying obeisance to murtis at a non-Sindhi temple, bowing before the Guru Granth Sahib at a Punjabi gurdwara, and giving gifts to the tomb of a Sufi placed Gurnani in relation to three ritual hierarchies that excluded each other. There were no murtis in the gurdwara or the dargah; there was no Guru Granth Sahib in the temple or the dargah, and there were no graves in the gurdwara or the temple. Similarly, the havans, with a Brahman reciting Sanskrit slokas before a fire, placed Gurnani in a different ritual scheme than the continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib did. These ritual schemes contrasted with the combination of the various elements at the Hari Om Mandir into a single integrated hierarchy. His participation at the non-Sindhi sites, therefore, repeatedly reinforced the prominent definitions that these three traditions were separate while the Hari Om Mandir inscribed the Sindhi understanding that all of these elements related to Hinduism.

Another Sindhi Hindu living in Atlanta, Georgia, explained the significance of these different combinations explicitly. Growing up in Mumbai where a larger concentration of Sindhi insulated her from some of these issues, she did not realize that Sikhs did not accept Hindu deities because she only visited Sindhi sites that acknowledged both the Guru Granth Sahib and Hindu deities. When she moved to Atlanta, the only site with a Guru Granth Sahib was a Punjabi Sikh gurdwara. Participating in the ritualized activities there, she realized the distinction between Sikh and Hindu because she experienced it in a gurdwara that specifically excluded Hindu deities. The combination had been inscribed on her body as a normal part of the ritual scheme of Sindhi Hindus, but she never realized the alternative understandings until she participated in a Punjabi Sikh ritual scheme in the United States.

The impact of immersion in a non-Sindhi society and participation in multiple ritual schemes became evident in Gurnani's shifting use of the terms Hindu, Sikh, and Sindhi. During our interview, Gurnani struggled between using terms according to the Sindhi definitions and the dominant understandings in Lucknow. At one point, he asserted,

Both Sikh and all Hindu, all Hindu including Sikhs, Punjabis, Sindhis, are cremated. At that time Ardas is read, which is from Guru Nanak. Other Hindus, they pray from the Gita or other slokas. And on 13th day from death, Sikhs who have turbans, they necessarily have Guru Granth Sahib *path*. For 13 days they go on reading and on last day it is completed and special functions are held. Some Sindhis do this. Other Hindus and some Sindhis do havan on 13th day, the closing ceremony in memory of a dead person.

Throughout this excerpt, he juggled the three categories, Sindhi, Sikh, and Hindu, thus implying the liminal position of Sindhis and the absence of adequate terms to express that liminality. He first corrected his statement "Both Sikhs and Hindus," which differentiated Sikhs from Hindus, to "All Hindus including Sikhs, Punjabis, Sindhis" thus incorporating Sikhs and Sindhis as sub-categories within the Hindu category. When he implied that reciting Ardas at a cremation was standard, perhaps for Sindhis and Punjabis, he contrasted that activity with the practices of "other Hindus." He then differentiated the practices of "Sikhs who have turbans" from "other Hindus," while placing "some Sindhis" in each category.

This continual switching and correction of statements between Sindhi understandings and the dominant understandings was common among Sindhi Hindus in Lucknow. It reflected the challenges that they faced from both the dominance of particular definitions of these labels and the inscription of differing ritual hierarchies on their bodies as they participated at Sindhi and non-Sindhi religious sites. In order to communicate effectively with non-Sindhis, Sindhi Hindus often resorted to the dominant understandings of these religious elements, which then undermined their ability to consistently use the terms according to Sindhi understandings. These repeated references to dominant understandings suggested that Sindhi Hindu traditions were a conscious blend of elements from distinct religions, making them syncretic, while other statements that the same Sindhis made rejected the syncretic label because everything belonged within the boundaries of Hinduism.

Definitions, Agency, and a Deeper Analysis

When I first became acquainted with the Sindhi Hindus in Lucknow, I saw in their experiences an excellent topic that would serve as a clear example of religious harmony and porous borders between religions. As I conducted my fieldwork, however, I realized that they were not paragons of religious tolerance or pluralism. The boundaries that I saw them crossing arose from my own acceptance of particular definitions of these religious borders. Even though I was aware of the incomplete nature of the definitions, I generally categorized practices using the dominant definitions of these religions. According to the dominant understanding of the Sindhis, they were not crossing boundaries or disregarding the significance of those boundaries. They simply challenged the dominant understandings of where those borders should be.

Therefore, most Sindhi Hindus did not identify Sindhi traditions as syncretic. Their practices fit within their general understanding of the boundaries of Hinduism. However, in the context of diaspora, the influence of the dominant understandings, through both their cultural immersion and the impact of ritual inscription, pushed Sindhi representations towards an acceptance of the dominant definitions and, therefore, an implicit representation of their traditions as syncretic.

Sindhi Hindus also implicitly recognized a syncretic component of their practices in diaspora, though not drawing on the traditional meaning of syncretism as the blending of different religions. Rather than blending distinct religions, this blending involved the interaction of Sindhi Hindu traditions with the dominant Hindu traditions of Lucknow. As Gurnani recognized, they were in a “time of transition.” In Lucknow, the community consciously blended their traditions with the practices of non-Sindhi Hindus and debated the nature of that blending. Therefore, these examples of Sindhi Hindus specifically illustrate syncretism as a process of power between strategies of blending and boundary maintenance that more recent scholarship has developed.

Respect for the agency of Sindhi Hindus and the accordant recognition of the contestation surrounding definitions of religion corresponds to this use of syncretism. To apply syncretism in this situation requires scholars to consider the competing definitions of Hinduism in Sindh and

Lucknow that Sindhis were blending. Therefore, this use of syncretism explicitly rejects any assumption of a singular definition of Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam. Of course, this use of syncretism must include the contestation among Sindhi Hindus as to what constitutes Sindhi traditions or the similar contestation surrounding the Hindu traditions of Lucknow, which are aspects of the continual recreation of ritualized activities in any tradition. Moreover, this recognition of conscious syncretism confirms that the homogenizing power of the dominant definitions does not over-power Sindhi traditions automatically, as Sindhi Hindus are continually making deliberate choices that, at times, defy homogenization.

Beyond a different understanding of syncretism, respect for the agency of Sindhis also enables a fuller analysis of religious experiences on the individual level. As Gurnani's "time of transition" illustrates, these individuals, like the institutions themselves, blend their ritualized activities as they negotiate the recreation of their heritage in a different context, or even in the same context as it shifts over time. Perhaps more significantly, by treating the variety of individual religious practices as equally valid, scholars can analyze more fully the influences that arise from following a varied group of practices, something which is not only a factor for communities like the Sindhis. Many people in India and elsewhere participate in ritualized activities that traditionally draw on different religious traditions. Taking these experiences seriously encourages the use of analytical lenses, such as the concepts of ritual resistance and inscription, that highlight the dynamics of the experiences, including internal tensions in such practices. Recognizing these different definitions, which communities establish in practice and in their ideological statements, moreover, highlights the complexity and vitality within religious traditions without creating further challenges for communities who defy the dominant definitions.

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The Concept of “Religion” in Mesoamerican Languages¹

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Abstract

The article examines whether the indigenous languages in the cultural region called Mesoamerica comprise words corresponding to the European concept of “religion.” In spite of the fact that the highly advanced phonetic (i.e. logosyllabic) writing systems are capable of expressing and recognising abstract representations in the languages, extant pre-Columbian Mesoamerican inscriptions do not contain words which can be rendered as “religion.” Attention has therefore been directed to the descriptions of indigenous languages made by Spanish ethnographer-missionaries in the 16th and 18th centuries. Six indigenous lexemes translated as “religion” in colonial dictionaries, are analysed. It is, however, argued that the native terms for “religion” were in reality constructed by the Spanish ethnographer-missionaries in order to promote evangelisation and the conversion of the indigenous people. Nevertheless, it is not ineffective to operate with “religion” as an etic notion when analysing Mesoamerican cultures. A theory is put forward suggesting that a linguistic/philological examination of a given language offers a strategy for defining “religion” as a cultural analytical category according to Max Weber’s notion of “ideal type.”

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1. Introduction*1.1. The complicated concept of “religion”*

The goal of this article is to explore whether a dichotomy between “religion” and the “non-religious” was acknowledged by the indigenous people of the area scholars today designate as “Mesoamerica.” Did and do the people of this region have words or terms, in their languages and cognitive systems, corresponding to the Western concept of “religion”? And if evidence for a notion of “religion” in Mesoamerican languages is not detectable, can this concept be applied to analyse cultures in this part of the world?

The etymology of the category “religion” derives from the Latin term *religio* — probably from *religare*, “to bind fast” or *relegere*, “to re-read” (Flood 1999:44).³ Hence it is a word of the European culture. A definition of the concept of “religion” has been and still is under critique. Scholars do not agree what this complicated category signifies. A final undisputed definition of “religion” thus does not exist. We therefore face a problem when examining whether corresponding notions can be found in non-European languages.

As Gavin Flood states, a definition of the concept “religion” is important because it implies research strategies and practices within the scholarly discipline of “religious” studies (Flood 1999:65). I will not give an account of the different theories which have been proposed about the meaning of the concept of religion,⁴ instead I shall argue for its

sity of Oslo. A great part of the philological material was collected when I was a Visiting Fellow during the autumn term of 2004 at the Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, USA. I am most grateful to the staff of the Tozzer Library, Harvard University for their valuable assistance.

³ Jonathan Z. Smith asserts, however, that this etymology is uncertain and not relevant before the 16th century (Smith 1998:269–70).

⁴ An immense literature exists on this topic. Cf. for instance Thrower 1999.

value as a cultural analytical category within the notion of Max Weber's (Weber 1969) "ideal type." I will return to this issue, but let me first intimate what constitutes the ideal cultural concept of "religion." It is my hypothesis that language, i.e. how human beings understand the world and their own place in it, suggests a strategy for defining this concept. As we shall see, classifications made by Mesoamerican languages indicate that the fundamental dimension or aspect of "religion" is the belief that phenomena, beings, institutions, time and space are totally different from human (and other natural) beings and their life experiences. It is the distinctive human character in contrast to the preternatural, i.e. non-human or non-natural, which constitutes the concept of "religion" in the languages. Non-human or non-natural elements consequently belong to the "religious" domain. This sphere influences the lives and dominates the world view and experiences — in stories we call myths, in actions or ritual practices, in the organisation of society or the community in socio-political institutions, in the economy, judicial system, structures, places, space, and concepts of time — of human beings. Each of these units incorporates the cultural system which we can classify as "religious."

1.2. *Mesoamerica*

"Mesoamerica" has been defined⁵ as a cultural-geographical region incorporating the north-western, central and southern Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and the western part of Honduras and El Salvador. In this area peoples like the Maya, Aztecs, Olmecs, Zapotecs, Toltecs, Tlapanecs, Teotihuacanos, Tarascas, Otomís, Mixtecs etc., lived in urban "high cultures" c. 1000 BC–1521 AD. Archaeologists have divided the late history of Mesoamerica to the conquest of the Spaniards in 1521 AD into three principal periods: the Pre-Classic,⁶ c. 2000 BC–c. 200 AD; the Classic, c. 200–c. 910 AD, and the Post-Classic c. 910–1521 AD.⁷ The Colonial

⁵ "Mesoamerica" was originally outlined as a cultural and geographical unity by Paul Kirchhoff in 1943 (Kirchhoff 1943). Other definitions of this region have been suggested as well (cf. Carrasco 2001b:ix, xiii).

⁶ The pre-Classic or the formative period is further divided into three major sub-periods, the early- (c. 2000–c. 1000 BC), middle- (c. 1000–c. 400 BC), and late-Classic (c. 400 BC–c. 250 AD).

⁷ 1521 AD is the date of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire. The last independent Maya ruler, Kanék, surrendered to the Spaniards in 1697 AD.

period is dated from the Spanish conquest of Mesoamerica to the independence of Mexico in 1821.

Despite their particular traditions and languages, the ethnic groups of Mesoamerica have several cultural and religious traits in common. Contacts existed between the different ethnic communities through migrations, pilgrimage, trade, diplomacy, war and conquest. They, to some extent, shared a 260-day and a 365-day calendar (which together form a 52-year cycle called the Calendar Round), a vigesimal counting system, screen fold books called codices by modern scholars, principles of writing systems, a ball game, monumental architecture, religious symbols, rituals, and myths.⁸ I emphasise, however, that these common “Mesoamerican” cultural and religious elements are far from homogeneous. It is also quite doubtful that the “Mesoamericans” recognised a general identity. “Mesoamerica” has nonetheless been analysed as one religious and cultural system by scholars (cf. López Austin 1993). The designation “Mesoamerica,” constructed by modern scholars, therefore serves as an “ideal type” (Weber 1969). Mesoamerican religion is in this manner not a small tradition, but in many ways comparative to the concept of so-called “world religions.”⁹

Millions of descendants of the indigenous people whom the Spaniards met in Mesoamerica at the beginning of the 16th century are present today. Many elements of the Mesoamerican traditions exist, even if they are more or less influenced by particularly Catholic Christianity — first forced upon them by the Spanish missionaries between the 16th and 18th centuries — or to a lesser degree by African religions and later by Protestant Christianity. A religious compound or “syncretism” must, however, not be overstated in relation to the indigenous people who in many cases have defined Christianity within their own cultural system.¹⁰ Instead

⁸ The ethnic groups in Mesoamerica also shared many cultural traits with indigenous people in the south-west of northern America. These are indigenous peoples of the states Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Utah in USA, and the states of Sonora, Chihuahua and Sinaloa in Mexico. Here lives and lived tribes like the Apache, Hopi, Zuni, Navajo and Yaqui etc.

⁹ Cf. Beyer 1998, Young 1992, and Smith 1998 for critiques of the concept “world religion.”

¹⁰ Cf. Farriss 1984 for the Maya; Whitecotton 1977 for the Zapotec; Terraciano 2001 for the Mixtec; Burkhart 1989 and Lockhart 1992 for the Nahuatl. See Duverger 1987 and Gruzinski 1988; 1992 as well.

of syncretism, a categorisation of modern indigenous religious conceptions as “Nahuasation,” “Mayasation,” “Mixtecisation,” “Zapotecisation” etc. of Christianity is more appropriate. The languages, histories, religions and traditions are essential parts of the Mesoamerican people’s threatened identity and important in their struggles for religious, political, economic, judicial and social rights.

1.3. *Written Primary Sources of the Pre-Columbian Period*

Did the writing systems of the cultures in Mesoamerica comprise a notion synonymous with the Christian European concept of “religion”? And did these primary sources — i.e. the literature the Mesoamericans produced — contain notions outlining a particular ideological, institutional and ritual system as “religious”?¹¹

After the invasion of Mesoamerica, during the first half of the 16th century, the Spanish prohibited the use of the Mesoamerican people’s phonetic writing systems.¹² Many of the written sources were destroyed by Spanish priests because they contained “heathen” conceptions. Everything which reminded of the old religious systems was to be annihilated. The sons and daughters of the old indigenous aristocracy were sent to monastery schools to learn to read and write in the Latin alphabet. Despite the massive destructions committed by Spanish clerics through a number of auto-da-fés, and the ruinous effects of the climate, there is extant written information, though only a fragmented corpus. The inscriptions were painted and carved on every thinkable media like ceramic vessels, monumental architecture, stelae,¹³ stone discs (altars), in caves, on portable objects like shell, jade, bone and in books (codices).¹⁴ These texts describe the history, myths, cosmology, rituals, trade, tributes, war, diplomacy, the political system, ruling dynasty etc. of the natives.

I shall now delineate the principles of the Mesoamerican writing systems to examine whether they were capable of expressing abstract con-

¹¹ John Monaghan (2000) has addressed the issue whether there is an intellectual self understanding of “religion” among indigenous contemporary cultures in Mesoamerica. I extend my thanks to Professor Stephen D. Houston for making me aware of this essay.

¹² But they did not forbid the use of pictorial writing in Central Mexico and Oaxaca.

¹³ A stela is a huge stone monument that can be up to 35 foot high.

¹⁴ A codex is a book made of bark paper or deer skin.

cepts such as a notion of “religion” will require. During the late Pre-Classic logossyllabic writing systems were developed in several parts of Mesoamerica. What makes the case of the Classic Maya unique in Mesoamerica is that they have a nearly fully deciphered corpus of texts in a logossyllabic system of writing.¹⁵ The Maya system of writing was first decoded in the second half of the 1980s and the 1990s (cf. Coe 1992; Houston 2000; Houston, Chinchilla Mazariegos and Stuart 2001).¹⁶ Accounts of Spanish clerics from 1500–1700 AD and archaeological remains have been the dominating sources in the research of the Maya’s pre-colonial history. We have therefore only recently got a primary source to Mayan and Mesoamerican religion, culture and history, as we have already had for a long time for cultures in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, and China. The Spanish linguist Alfonso Lacadena has recently argued quite convincingly that also the pre-Columbian Aztecs applied a logossyllabic writing system in their manuscripts. Much work needs, however, to be done before the corpus is systematised and deciphered.¹⁷

But what constitutes a logossyllabic writing system? There are three designations for phonetic, i.e. glottographic,¹⁸ writing systems:

1. An “alphabetic” system (for instance English, Spanish, Norwegian, Sanskrit, Russian, Arabic, Hebrew etc.) means that the signs represent single letters or sounds.

¹⁵ The Zapotecs of Oaxaca, Mexico probably had a logossyllabic system of writing. “Isthmian-writing” of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Mexico and the signs on the so-called “Cascajal Block” from San Lorenzo, Veracruz in Mexico are also, conceivably, logossyllabic. Neither the writing of the Zapotecs, the “Isthmian” nor that on the “Cascajal Block” has, however, been deciphered (Urcid 2001; Houston and Coe 2003; Skidmore 2006; Rodríguez Martínez *et al.* 2006).

¹⁶ The ever expanding Maya corpus embodies more than 15 000 inscriptions (Houston 2000:131). Most of the inscriptions are from the Classic period of the central lowland, Petén and Belize, and in the southern lowland, lower Usumacinta, upper Usumacinta, Pasión og Motagua. There are also some inscriptions from the Post-Classic period in the north, Campeche, Puuc, Chenes, Yucatán, and the Caribbean coast (Wichmann 2000).

¹⁷ Cf. Lacadena 2005; Lacadena forthcoming a; Lacadena forthcoming b; Lacadena and Wichmann forthcoming.

¹⁸ “Pictorial-ideographic” (Dibble 1971:324), “pictorial” (Prem 1992: 54), “semasiographic” (Boone 2000:30–31) or “iconographic” (Jens Braarvig, personal communication, 2006) are designations for non-phonetic graphic systems.

2. A “syllabic” system consists of signs representing syllables or combinations of sounds (for instance Cherokee and Linear B).
3. A “logosyllabic” writing system, also called “hieroglyphic,”¹⁹ denotes a writing system incorporating two types of signs. These are word signs, also called logograms, and phonetic syllables or vowel signs (sound signs). The logosyllabic writing system thus consists of logographs for whole words and signs for syllables and vowels. A logogram can be represented by a concrete and an abstract sign. Logograms are morpheme signs which can be either a lexicographic morpheme (i.e. a language element which refers to objects, concepts, and actions, in other words everything which does not belong to grammar) or a grammatical morpheme, i.e. a grammatical form. There are examples of logograms in English functioning as lexicographic morphemes, for instance numbers (8), mathematical symbols (+) or symbols for a currency (\$). Phonetic signs incorporate vowels or syllables. The syllables usually embody a consonant followed by a vowel (CV) or a consonant, vowel and a consonant (CVC) in the Classic Maya inscriptions (Wichmann 2000a).

Logosyllabic writing, because it is phonetic, provides opportunities to express abstract ideas and concepts through a specific language. The Spanish missionary Torbio de Benavente Motolinía narrates that in the city Cholollan (Mexico), not long after the Spanish conquest, he asked the people to confess their sins written in their own writing system. There came so many manuscripts with written confessions that Motolinía could not receive all (Motolinía 1971; Boone 2000:245). The account of Motolinía confirms that the writing system of the Aztecs (Nahua) was indeed capable of transmitting ideas and notions corresponding with the Catholic Christian conception of “sin.” But despite the fact that this type of writing system is capable of expressing and recognising abstract representations in the language, extant Mesoamerican inscriptions do not comprise words which can be translated as “religion.”

¹⁹ The concept “hieroglyph” is ambiguous. It is a designation for both individual signs and combinations of signs in expressions, like words or compound of words. For example the Classic Maya “hieroglyph” for “to be born” incorporates three signs: **SIY-ya-ja** (Wichmann 2000). A more correct term for the writing system is therefore logosyllabic.

2. Words for “Religion” Written Down in Dictionaries of Spanish Ethnographer-Missionaries

Attention must therefore be turned to the descriptions and accounts written by the Spaniards in the 16th and 18th centuries, in order to explore whether there are preserved words for “religion” in the indigenous languages. After Mesoamerica had been invaded by the Spanish at the beginning of the 16th century, representatives of the Spanish monastic orders — the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and the Augustinians — began early, on the command of Carlos I of Spain (i.e. Castilla and Aragon), to evangelise the indigenous people of “New Spain.”²⁰ Three Franciscan missionaries from Flanders arrived in Mesoamerica as early as 1523. But the first official missionaries were twelve Spanish Franciscans who came the following year. The Dominicans and the Augustinians followed the Franciscans in 1526 and in 1533. The Jesuits entered Mesoamerica a bit later, in 1572. The Spanish monks were well educated. Their ambition was to make systematic descriptions of the languages, history and cultures of the Mesoamericans. This was a conscious strategy to ease the conversion of the indigenous people from their “pagan” conceptions and practices to Christianity. The missionaries wrote dictionaries, grammars and ethnographic monographs comprising records of modes of living and traditions. There exist quite a large number of contemporary accounts of indigenous culture, language and history written by these Spanish evangelicals, who have thus received the designation “ethnographer-missionaries,” from between the 16th and 18th centuries.²¹ Numerous records were made of the Aztec or Nahuatl culture in the Valley of Mexico, since the Aztecs had dominated, through their empire, a great part of Mesoamerica before the Spaniards arrived. Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, was a *lingua franca* in the post-Classic period in Mesoamerica like Latin and Greek in the Roman Empire. Spanish civil and religious officials therefore promoted Nahuatl and used it as an administrative language in the early colonial period.

²⁰ Mexico, after the name of the capital Mexica-Tenochtitlan of the Aztecs, was the designation the Spaniards eventually chose to denominate this country. The Aztecs called themselves “Mexica.”

²¹ Cf. for instance Ricard 1966, Duverger 1987 and Baudot 1995 about the Catholic mission and the work of the ethnographer-missionaries in Mexico in the 16th century.

Thus, no dictionaries were written exclusively by the natives. But the ethnographer-missionaries applied native informants and assistants when they gathered information. We are therefore bound to use the dictionaries the evangelical Spaniards wrote between the 16th and 18th centuries. The ethnographer-missionaries produced quite many dictionaries and grammars. Over a hundred books in or about Mesoamerican languages were published only during the fifty years after the Spanish conquest.

We shall now see whether we can locate entries in the Spanish ethnographer-missionaries' dictionaries for the term "religion" in the languages of the natives. In search for a translated word for "religion," the chosen strategy is to explore the Spanish-Indigenous section of the dictionaries. The term *religión* in Spanish is equivalent to English "religion."²² But let us first consider a cardinal problem of this philological method.

The Jesuits worked in the northern part of Mexico where their mission met with tough resistance from the natives in the 17th and 18th centuries. The Italian Benito Rinaldini (1695–1764) was a Jesuit missionary among the Tepeguana in the states of Durango and Chihuahua in Mexico. He published *Arte de la lengua tepeguana. Con vocabulario, confesionario y catechismo* in 1743. In this book, Rinaldini translates "religion" as:

Religion, *Papali Viajammoe*.

Religioso, *Pali*.

Religioso, *hazerfe, Anean in palite, in paliteanta*. (Rinaldini 1994:119)

Religioso means "pious," "God-fearing," or simply "religious." We cannot, however, analyse Rinaldini's recording of the Tepeguana-term for "religion" since his dictionary lacks a Tepeguana-Spanish section. A possibility is of course to use modern dictionaries based on data collected by linguists in the 20th and 21st centuries. This, however, is complicated

²² Assorted Mesoamerican notions may well together, as a family of concepts, be subordinated to the abstract superior concept of "religion." Other relevant modern Spanish concepts like *sagrado*, *sacral*, *ritual*, *creencia* and *costumbre* can thus be studied in the dictionaries. Particularly *costumbre* ("custom"; "habit") is a cardinal word among the present day Mesoamericans, not only to outline their own religious practice, but for "religion" as well (Wichmann, personal communication, 2005). An analysis pursuing this approach must, however, be a subject for a different study.

since the languages have undergone a change and development where several indigenous words have gone out of use. This concerns especially terms describing the deities, ceremonies and faith of the Mesoamericans which were actively counteracted by the Mission and later prohibited by the Spanish Inquisition. Thus, in order to execute a linguistic/philological analysis of the indigenous term for “religion,” we need dictionaries containing both a Spanish-Indigenous and an Indigenous-Spanish section. Fortunately, scores of Spanish ethnographer-missionary dictionaries comprise two parts, the Mesoamerican language translated into Spanish and Spanish translated into the Mesoamerican language.²³ I have found examples of indigenous lexemes for “religion” in dictionaries of Mixtec, Zapotec, Nahuatl, Tarasca/Michoacan, and the two Maya languages, Yucatec and Tzotzil. I will systematically analyse the various Mesoamerican translations for “religion” before investigating how they were constructed.

3. The Terms for “Religion” in Mixtec

The researcher partly meets the same problem as we have seen applying to Tepeguana, when investigating the two Mesoamerican languages Mixtec and Zapotec. The Mixtecs, who called themselves *Nuu Savi*, “people of

²³ Fray Alonso Urbano’s word-book of the Otomí language spoken in Central Mexico, called *Arte Breve de la lengua Otomí y Vocabulario Trilingüe. Español-Náhuatl-Otomí* (c. 1605–c. 1640), is even trilingual. This dictionary, which is based on Molina’s dictionary from 1555 (see below), translates from Spanish (Castilian) into Nahuatl and Otomí. The entry “religion”:

Religion, *teoyotica nemiliztli, yecnemiliztli* — *nachaayo nachaayo.mahonayo. Nahocayo. Mahiaqueayo.*

Religioso, *Teoyoticanenqui. Yecnemilice* — *ogayoacha. Ohogayo.*

Religiosamente, *Yeoyotica. Quallotica. Teoyotica* — *mahonayotho nahotho nachatho.*

Religion falsa, *Yztlacateoyotica nemiliztli* — *naphethomachaayo nayoachaphethom.*

Religioso assi, *Yztlacateoyotica nemimi-naphethomayoacha nogayoaphethomacha.*

Religiosamente assi, *Yztlacateoyotica nemiliztica yztlacayecnemiliztica-nonaphethomayochatho.nonayoaaphethomi acha.* (Urbano 1990:fo. 364)

This dictionary is, however, of dubious linguistic quality. The extant copy of the lost original text can be questioned as well.

the rain” or “the people belonging to the rain god,”²⁴ are especially known for their impressive illustrated manuscripts from the post-Classic period. They mainly reside in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Puebla and Guerrero (the Mixteca homeland) but also in Mexico City, Baja California Norte and on the west coast, in the southwest and the rural south of the US. Approximately half a million people speak Mixtec today.²⁵ Fray Francisco de Alvarado’s (1558–1603) dictionary, *Vocabulario en Lengua Mixteca*, of the Mixtec language was published in 1593. The Spanish entry for “religion” is rendered in Mixtec by Alvarado as:

Religion, *sacaa sanuhu, sayyo sanuhu, sasica, huaha*.

Religioso, *dzutu sasica huaha, sasi caij, sasica, sasinuhu*.

Religioso Sacerdote,²⁶ *dzutu sandidzo nuhu*. (Alvarado 1962:181)

The distinguished Mexican scholar Alfonso Caso has reconstructed from a grammar, *Arte en lengua Mixtec* published by the ethnographer-missionary Fray Antonio de los Reyes in 1603, a word list where Mixtec entries are translated into Spanish. Some of the words which Alvarado applied to translate “religion” into Mixtec, can be identified in this glossary. The central word is **nuhu**, which carries the prefix **sa-** in Alvarado. **Nuhu** is translated by Reyes as “God” (“dios”) and “earth” (“tierra”) (Caso 1962:127),²⁷ while the prefix **sa-** conveys a “quality” (“cualidad”) (Caso 1962:130). **Sacca** is a prefix, which means “where is it” (“dónde está”) (Caso 1962:130). **Sayyo** and **sasica** are not translated. **Huahu** is rendered as “good” (“bueno”) (Caso 1962:119). “Religion” or **sacaa sanuhu, sayyo sanuhu, sasica, huaha** can therefore be translated into English as “where there is a divine quality, a good(?) (?) divine quality.” The Mixtecs associated “religion” with deities or something divine,²⁸ and something good, according to Alvarado.

²⁴ “Mixtec,” which derives from Nahuatl *Mixtecatl*, also means “Cloud People” (Whitecotton 1977:23).

²⁵ Cf. Summer Institute of Linguistics: <http://www.sil.org/americas/mexico/24i-Population.htm>

²⁶ “Priest,” or more correctly, “religious specialist.”

²⁷ **Nuhu** is also a rendering of the entry “religioso.”

²⁸ Words like “god”/“deity” and “divine” can, however, also be criticised for being specific Christian concepts.

4. The Concept of “Religion” in Zapotec

The Zapotecs or Benizaa/Vinizaa (“cloud people” or “native people”) as they call themselves, mainly live, like the Mixtecs, in the Mexican state of Oaxaca.²⁹ More than 500,000 individuals speak a Zapotec language.³⁰

Fray Juan de Córdova’s Spanish-Zapotec dictionary *Vocabulario en lengua zapoteco* was published in 1578. Córdova was born in Spain in 1501 and travelled to Mexico as early as 1521. He became a member of the Dominican order in 1543 and probably arrived in Oaxaca, Mexico c. 1550. Córdova presumably remained in Oaxaca until his death in 1595. He wrote the *Vocabulario* and later a grammar (*Arte*) between 1572 and 1576. The dictionary and grammar by Córdova represents the work of about 30 years. We know that the Dominicans taught the Christian Catholic dogma in Zapotec and not in Spanish. Córdova’s relation with the Zapotec, as is the case with many other ethnographer-missionaries, is ambivalent. He participated in Inquisition processes, but also complained about Spanish civilians’ abuse of the Zapotecs. The dictionary by Córdova comprises 30,000 entries from various Zapotec dialects (Whitecotton and Whitecotton 1993). In the *Vocabulario* Córdova translates “religion” as:

Religion por culto. *Xiquela chijna pitào. Xiquela hueyána pitào.*
 Religion o orden, Vide orden. *Que la còpa pitào.*
 Religioso o frayle. *Còpa pitào.* (Córdova 1578:349)

There are no Zapotec-Spanish dictionaries from the Colonial period.³¹ The linguists Joseph W. Whitecotton and Judith Bradely Whitecotton

²⁹ The designation “Zapotec” derives from Nahuatl *tzapotecatli* (“people of the zapote tree”). This concept was employed to the native inhabitants of Oaxaca by the Aztecs in the fifteenth century (Whitecotton 1977: 23).

³⁰ Cf. Summer Institute of Linguistics: <http://www.sil.org/americas/mexico/24i-Population.htm>

³¹ Except for a brief, unpublished survey by Fray Juan Francisco Torralba called *Arte Zapoteco, confesionario, administracion de los santos sacramentos, y otras curiosidades, que en el se contienen*, MS, Ayer Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago (Whitecotton and Whitecotton 1993). Another important Zapotec glossary, contemporary with Córdova, is *Junta Colombina. Vocabulario castellano-zapoteco*. México. Oficina Tipográfica de la

have, however, written a Zapotec-Spanish dictionary reconstructed from the Colonial Spanish-Zapotec word-books, mainly the *Junta Colombina* (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993). Zapotec incorporated and incorporates several dialects with assorted grammatical forms and spellings. Zapotec was never, like Spanish in the 16th century, standardised as a written language (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993). The Whitcottons' dictionary also has **Xíguela**, although composed with other morphemes, as the central lexeme for “religion”:

Xiguelachiñayuutoo, culto divino.

Xiquelahueyanabitoo, religión, el culto. (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993:376).

Xíguela can be translated as “being” or “essence.”³² Unfortunately, the words in the post position, modifying **Xíguela**, **chijna pitào** and **hueyána pítóo**, cannot be interpreted. But there is an indication from the Whitcottons' word-book where **Xiguelachijna** is rendered as “power” and “authority” or “life,” “way of life.”³³ **Bitoo** means “God” (“dios”) (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993:34).³⁴ **Copa** is rendered as “protector” or “defender.”³⁵ **Hueyana** can be translated as “religious specialist” (“ministro ó ministro”) (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993:138). **Xiquela chijna (Xiguelachiñayuutoo)pitào. Xiquela hueyána pítóo (Xiquelahueyanabitoo)**, can accordingly tentatively be paraphrased as “God's authority or God's being, God's religious specialist” and **Que la còpa pitào**, “protector of God.”

Secretaría de Fomento. 1893, republished in 1982 as Publicación del H. Ayuntamiento Popular de Juchitan, Oaxaca, México, Imprenta Madero, author(s) unknown and *Anónimo Quaderno de idioma zapoteco del Valle... San Martin Tilcaxete*. Ms., John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. 1793. Both dictionaries are, however, based on Córdova (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993).

³² “*Xiguela*, ser, el ser de cualquier cosa. *Xiguela Dios*, esencia de Dios” (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993: 375). “*Xiguela Dios*, ser, la esencia divina” (ibid. 376).

³³ “*Xiguelachiña*, poder ó autoridad. *Xiguelachiña*, vida el modo de vivir que tiene cada uno” (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993: 376).

³⁴ The letters “p” and “b” are compounded in Zapotec.

³⁵ “*Copa*, guarda, patron, defensor” (Whitcotton and Whitcotton 1993:52).

5. “Teyotica Nemiliztli” as a Nahuatl Designation for “Religion”

The Aztecs or Mexica was originally a Nahuatl-speaking nomadic tribe.³⁶ They founded the city of Tenochtitlan,³⁷ today’s Mexico City, which became the capital of their short-lived empire in the northern and central part of Mexico from 1345 to 1521 AD. Millions of descendants of the Nahua, who formed the Aztec Empire, are living in Mexico, with more than 1.5 million people speaking Nahuatl.³⁸

The earliest and outstanding word-book in Classic Nahuatl is the Spanish-Nahuatl, Nahuatl-Spanish *Vocabulario en Lengua Castellana Y Mexicana Y Mexicana y Castellana*, by Fray Alonso de Molina (1513–1579), published 1555–1571. This dictionary was hence published only fifty years after the Spanish invasion of Mexico. The Franciscan Molina, who had grown up in Mexico, was one of two or three Spaniards with complete mastery of Nahuatl at the time. He prepared the dictionary with indigenous informants several decades before it came to be published. The professionalism of Molina as a lexicographer is highly praised by modern linguists and philologists. Molina translates the Spanish term “religión” with the Nahuatl word **Teyotica Nemiliztli** (Molina 1977: 103). What does this word signify when translated directly into English? **Teyotica** can be rendered as “spiritual” (“spiritualmente,” Molina 1977:100). *Teyotl* designates something “spiritual” or “divine” (“cosa spiritual, o cosa divina,” Molina 1977:101). The root of the adjective is *teotl* or *teutl*, which Molina renders as “God” (“dios,” Molina 1977:101; 112).³⁹ Hence **Teyotica** alludes to the “spiritual,” or the “divine.” What about

³⁶ The term “Aztec” derives from *aztecatl*, “person from Aztlán.” Aztlán, which can be paraphrased as “the white place” or “the place of the herons” in Nahuatl, was the designation for their mystic place of origin. The name “Mexica” was given to the Aztecs by their patron deity, Huitzilopochtli, during their migration from Aztlán.

³⁷ The sign for Tenochtitlan is an emblem in the flag of modern Mexico. The name alludes to the myth of the foundation of the city and the nation of the Aztecs. The emblem suggests the significance of the Aztecs to the identity of modern Mexico.

³⁸ Cf. Summer Institute of Linguistics: <http://www.sil.org/americas/mexico/24i-Population.htm>. Nahuatl-speakers are living in Federal District (Mexico City, D.F.), Durango, Guerrero, Michoacán, Morelos, Oaxaca, Puebla, Jalisco, Nayarit, San Luis Potosí, Tabasco, Tlaxcala, Sonora, Sinaloa, and Veracruz in Mexico, but also in El Salvador.

³⁹ *Teotl*, “God” is related to *Teopoa*, “suffer; affliction; anguish” (Campbell 1985:312).

the word **Nemiliztli**? The French lexicographer Rémi Siméon's *Diccionario de la lengua Náhuatl o mexicana* (1885), which is based on Molina's *Vocabulario* as well as on other sources, renders **Nemiliztli** as “vida, conducta, manera de vivir”⁴⁰ and **Teoyotica Nemiliztli** as “religion, vida religiosa” (Siméon 1997:324). **Nemi-liz** can also signify “continence, chastity, or a clean life” (“continencia, castidad, o vida limpia” Campbell 1985:207). **Teoyotica Nemiliztli** thus denotes that an individual is leading a religious, i.e. a spiritual or divine pure life.⁴¹

6. “Dioseño Cez Hangua” as a Tarasca/ Michoacán word for “religion”

The Tarascan realm was, after the Aztec, the greatest empire in Mesoamerica in 1522. From 1450 to 1521 AD, it was in continuous military conflict with the Aztecs. Tarascan comprised a large part of the west central highlands of Mexico and the modern state of Michoacán. The Spaniards called the dominating ethnic group, who spoke the language Michoacán or Tarasca, “Tarascan.” This people call themselves Tarascan or Purépecha (“commoners”) today. Modern Tarasca is spoken in large parts of the state of Michoacán, particularly in Querétaro and Guanajuato. The Tarascans had all the symptoms of an urban culture. Their capital, Tzintzuntzan, incorporated around 35,000 inhabitants. The evangelical mission to this region was first led by the Franciscans from 1526 and later by the Augustinians from 1537. The diocese of Michoacán was founded in 1536. The conquest entailed not only a socio-political, but a cultural revolution as well since members of the dynasty and the high aristocracy of Tarascan married Spaniards within the first decade of the colonial period (Pollard 2001:187–89).

R.P.Fr. Maturino Gilberti (1498–1585) was a Franciscan priest who worked in Michoacán. He was born in Toulouse, France and travelled to “New Spain” in 1531 where he was a missionary among the Tarasca for

⁴⁰ *Nemiliztli*, “Life, vida, conducta, manera de vivir” (Karttunen 1983:166). Of the root: Nem(i), pret. To live/vivir o morar. In compound constructions NEM(I) also has the sense “to go about doing something” (Karttunen 1983:165).

⁴¹ *Teopixcanemiliztli*. *Teotl-Pia-ca-nemi-liz*, “religious life, vida religiosa (101),” according to R. Joe Campbell's morpheme-analytical dictionary (Campbell 1985:209; 313).

the rest of his life. He wrote the *Diccionario de la Lengua Tarasca o Michoaca* in 1559. Gilberti rendered “religion” as **dioseo cez hangua** (Gilberti 1962:463). “**Dioseo**” is a bizarre word. **Dios** is Spanish for “God” while **-eo** can be a Tarasca suffix, maybe corresponding to **-yo** (for example in **teo:-yo-tl**) in Nahuatl.⁴² It can be understood as referring to something “spiritual” or “divine” (Karttunen 1983:228). **Hangua** means “life” (“vida o manear de biuir,” Gilberti 1962:51). “Divine or spiritual life” is thus the translation of this concept which, according to Gilberti, is synonymous with the term “religion.”

7. “Okol K’u”/“Ocul Kuu” and “Ch’uul Xanbal, Utzil Xanbal” as Terms for “Religion” in Maya Languages

The Maya were not organised in a large empire in the pre-Columbian period. The Classic and post-Classic Maya cultures were principally organised in cities and city states. Some cities were bigger than others and at times created hegemonies. The term “Maya” comprises around seven million people who speak a Mayan language today (there are about 30 extant Mayan languages). The assorted contemporary Mayan peoples are ethnic and linguistic minorities in the Mexican states of Veracruz, Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo, in Belize, in Guatemala, and in the western parts of El Salvador and Honduras. The language situation of the Maya is thus more complicated than in other Mesoamerican cultures. I have found two lexemes which have been translated as “religion” by Spanish ethnographer-missionaries. Those two terms, which have no relation, derive from the Maya languages Yucatec and Tzotzil.

7.1. “Okol K’u”/“Ocul Kuu” in Yucatec

Yucatec is spoken in the Yucatán Peninsula of Mexico, in northern Belize and in parts of Guatemala by 750,000 people.

The earliest recognised dictionary of the Maya languages is by Don Juan Pío Pérez, attributed to Fray Antonio de Ciudad Real’s (1551–1617) *Calepino de Motul. Diccionario Maya-Español*. Not much is known about the author of this six volume word-book. We can only gather that

⁴² Wichmann, personal communication, 2005.

Fray Antonio de Ciudad Real resided in Yucatan, Mexico between 1573 and 1617. **Okol K'u** or **Ocul kuu** is in the *Calepino de Motul. Diccionario Maya-Español* noted as the lexeme for “religion” in Yucatec. **Ocol kuu** is rendered as “chastity and abstinence” (“castidad, continencia y religion,” Arzápalo Marín 1995:587; 1990) and **Okol k'u** as “to demonstrate grief” or “to wear cloths of grief” (“luto y traerlo; enlutarse”). Thus (**Ah**) **Okol k'u** signifies “chaste, pure, abstinent, penitent, hermit” (“casta o casto; casto, abstinente, penitente o continente, ermitaño”), while **Okol K'utah** is translated as “ayunar o abstenerse de coito aunque sea de su mujer,” i.e. one who fasts and abstains from sexual activities even if it is with his own wife (Barrera Vásquez 1991:598). In the *Diccionario de San Francisco*, from the manuscript of Don Juan Pío Pérez (1798–1859), “religion” is not an entry in the Spanish-Maya section. But **Ocol ku** is rendered as “luto, tener luto, enlutarse” and **Ocol ku; num ocol ku, num coycah**, “castidad, abstinencia,” i.e. to demonstrate sorrow or dress in clothes of grief, chastity, and abstinence (Michelson 1976:269).⁴³ “Religion” is hence associated with morality, discipline, to act with grief, abstinence, and chastity in the Yucatec culture. Abstinence and chastity are, however, not only Christian values. Segments of the aristocracy of the K'iche' Maya of Highland Guatemala are for instance outlined in the *Popol Wuj* as abstinent, fasting and chaste towards their deities (Tedlock 1996:192). This book was, with great certainty, not inspired by Catholic Christianity (Christenson 2000).

Again, we have an example of a compound word. **Okol**, “enter” (“entrar,” Barrera Vásquez 1991:597) and **K'u**, “God” (“Dios” Barrera Vásquez 1991:416). In a straight translation, **Okol K'u** can mean “to enter God.” This can refer to phenomena of mysticism where the believer becomes a part of the divine.

7.2. “Ch'uul Xanbal, Utzil Xanbal” in Tzotzil

The Tzotzil Maya live in the highland of Chiapas, Mexico. There are c. 230,000 Tzotzil Maya, whose language is their foremost hallmark of common identity.

⁴³ (**Ah**) *Hun Okol K'u*, “monje solitario; monje; religioso; anacoreta,” i.e. monk or hermit (Barrera Vásquez 1991:251).

The Tzotzil dictionary, *The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of Santo Domingo Zinacantán* from the city of Zinacantán, Chiapas, Mexico is an edited edition by the North-American linguist Robert M. Laughlin of a manuscript collected by an anonymous Dominican monk, probably at the end of the 16th century. The original disappeared after the Mexican revolution, but a copy of 351 pages comprising 11,000 Spanish-Tzotzil words was copied by the Bishop of Chiapas Francisco Orozco y Jiménez in 1906. Here are assorted examples of Tzotzil words paraphrased as “religion”:

Religión, *ch'uul xanbal*, *utzil xanbal*. (Laughlin and Haviland 1988: 744)
 Utz Xanbal, “religion, virtue.” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:300)

Ch'uul is Tzotzil for “sacred, spiritual”;⁴⁴ **Xan** means “to go,” “to travel”;⁴⁵ while **Utz** can be rendered as “correct, good, sacred, faithful.”⁴⁶ The lexemes marked in the cultural categories constructed by Laughlin in the *Thesaurus of the English-Tzotzil dictionary* are:

Religion, *utzil xanbal* (good life or walk), *ch'uul xanbal* (holy life or walk). (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:444)

(**Ch'uul**) **Utz Xanbal** can accordingly be said to convey a (sacred) righteous, correct way of life, metaphors for “belief, practices, and sacraments” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:485).

8. The Strategic Constructions of the Ethnographer-Missionaries

A rather large number of Mesoamerican words for “religion” have a quite general meaning in the Spanish dictionaries. “Religion” is associated with

⁴⁴ *Ch'uul*, “holy, spiritual” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:200).

⁴⁵ *Xan*, “travel, walk to or from a certain place.” *Xanbal*, “life, walk” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:300).

⁴⁶ *Utz*, “correct, elegant, faithfully, good, graceful, handsome, holy, just, merrily, polished, praiseworthy, pretty, well” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:157).

“deities or something divine,” “something which implies good things” (Mixtec); “God’s authority or God’s being, God’s religious specialist” and “protector of God” (Zapotec); a “divine or spiritual life” (Tarasca/Michoa); “to lead a religious, i.e. a spiritual or divine pure life” (Nahuatl); “a (sacred) upright, correct way of life” (Tzotzil). “Religion” is also connected with “morality, discipline, to act with grief, abstinence and chastity” among the Yucatec, values highly regarded in Mesoamerica before the Spanish invasion. These translations hence do not convey distinctive features associated either with Mesoamerican ideology nor with Catholic Christianity. Elements separating Mesoamerican beliefs and practices from Catholic Christianity can therefore not be recognised.

Linguists are today working in America recording indigenous languages in dictionaries and grammars. Frequently, no other than the Spanish loanword “religion” is recorded in a phonetic spelling, like in Itzaj Maya (Mexico).⁴⁷ But there are exceptions. The Ixil of San Gaspar Chajul, a Maya language of Guatemala, translates “religion” as:

Religión, *uk’é’ybal* (sustantivo derivado). (Jewett and Willis 1996: 397)
uk’é’ybal (sustantivo derivado), doctrina; religion; catequismo. (Ibid. 270)

Huaxalinguillo is a modern dialect of Nahuatl spoken by about 400 people in the village of Huautla in the state of Hidalgo, Mexico. Data were gathered from the local informant Señora Antonia Osorio de Valle in 1979 (Kimball 1980:1). “Religion” is rendered in this language as:

tiyoytl in (Kimball 1980:95)
tiyoytl in, religion (CN *teoyotl*) (for words beginning with *tio-*, see also *teo-*) (Kimball 1980:56)
Tiotl, teotl, “god” (Kimball 1980:56)

Otomí (Central Mexico), where the linguistic material was collected in the 1980s, translates “religion” as *nzokwä* (*ar*) (Hekking and Andrés de Jesús 1989:164).

⁴⁷ “*Relijiyon*, Sp. Religión” (Hofling and Tesucâun 1997:543).

These are notable examples since secularised modern linguists⁴⁸ cannot be suspected of creating a concept of religion which was not already present in the indigenous language. The modern indigenous terms for “religion” registered in the dictionaries, however, do not prove that some ethnic Mesoamerican groups had words for “religion” in their languages. The concepts may have been constructed under the influence of former ethnographer-missionaries, as translations of “doctrine” (“doctrina”), “catechism” (“catequismo”), “church” (“iglesia”) and “God” (“dios”) indicate. The indigenous people can also have created these words themselves during and after the colonial period. It is thus not possible to determine the existence of Mesoamerican notions of “religion” from contemporary dictionaries.

We recall that a direct rendition of **Okol K’u** in Yucatec (translated by the ethnographer-missionaries as “morality, discipline, to act with grief, abstinence, and chastity”) connotes “to enter into God.” This may be a case of a sort of mysticism where the believer becomes a part of the divine. But does this word compound indicate an indigenous concept of “religion”? It is anyway interesting that this term cannot be reproduced (unless **Okol K’u** was meant to be an indigenous metaphor) to suggest “morality, discipline, to act with grief, abstinence, and chastity,” as the Spanish lexicographer-missionaries have done.

It is indeed intriguing that the dictionaries distinguish between “true” and “false” religion, i.e. between Catholic Christianity, which was to be professed as the “truth” to replace the indigenous (“false”) religion.⁴⁹ Here the Mesoamerican category “religion” is separated from Catholicism, the

⁴⁸ Except for linguists from the North-American protestant evangelical-missionary research institute, “Summer Institute of Linguistics” or SIL.

⁴⁹ In his Nahuatl dictionary, Molina characterises “religion” as “Religion falsa,” *yztlaca teoyotica nemiliztli* (Molina 1977:103). The Tzotzil dictionary has “Religión falsa, Pak’tayej ch’uul xanbal” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:744) and “False Religion, Pak’tayej ch’uul xanbal” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:444). Tzotzil identifies “the false religion” with non-Christian belief and practice. It is classified as “Role-playing, imitation, secrecy, deceit. Native religion and witchcraft, disbelief and blasphemy” (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:484–85; 594; 653–54). Córdova operates with a Zapotec designation for “Religion falsa o culto assi a falso dios,” *Xiquela chijna pitào xihui. Religión o culto falsamente*

“true” or “genuine” “religion.” A classification between “true” and “false” religion again demonstrates that the dictionaries were mainly produced for Christian evangelical mission among the indigenous people. By using these native terms, pointing out acceptable or correct belief and practice, the Spanish missionaries wanted to convert the Mesoamericans to Catholic Christianity. The extinct language, Chiapaneca, was originally spoken in Chiapa de Corzo, Chiapas, Mexico. Mario Aguilar Penagos has collected words of this language from manuscripts written down by ethnographer-missionaries of the colonial period in the *Diccionario de la lengua Chiapaneca* (Penagos 1992:20–21). “Religion” is translated and classified into three categories as:

Religión, *Nacumbuí*

Religión Católica, *Nacumbuí católica*

Religión verdadera, *Nacumbuí námbue* (Penagos 1992:691)

Here “religion” (*Nacumbuí*) is distinguished from “true religion” (*Nacumbuí námbue*), and “Catholic religion” (*Nacumbuí católica*). Does this convey that the Chiapaneca had an original (pre-Columbian) concept of religion called **Nacumbuí**? This leads to the question of the original meaning of the words which the ethnographer-missionaries collected from Mesoamerican languages, before they were translated into “religion.” It is a serious methodological disadvantage that in analysing a compound word for “religion” of indigenous languages, the scholar is totally dependent on Catholic Christian interpretations. Locating the semantics of these terms as they were understood by the people who spoke the languages demands an investigation of the words within contexts of accounts by the natives. But unfortunately, not many texts where the local terms for “religion” are rendered are left in Mesoamerica.

The sources are best for Nahuatl, but again only within a Catholic Christian framework. **Teoyotica** (“in a divine or sacred way or sense;

hecho, *Quela hueyàna xibui*, *quela chij naxihui pitào*, *quela hueyàanalào quiàa* (Córdova 1578:349). Michoa also distinguishes between “true” and “false” religion: “Religion falsa,” *mintzinihco dioseo cez hangua* and “religioso assi,” *mintzinihco dioseo handi huren-guamongari* according to Gilberti (Gilberti 1962:463).

in Christian usage, spiritually”) was, according to Burkhart (1989),⁵⁰ constructed as a metaphor by the ethnographer-missionaries. The word originates from *teoyotl*, which is the abstract noun *teotl*, “divinity” or “sacred object” and the instrumental suffix *-(ti) ca*.⁵¹ This notion was applied by the ethnographer-missionaries to describe a distinct spiritual sphere different from the human world (Burkhart 1989:214). **Teoyotica** was used by Spanish clerics in other frames of reference as well. **Teoyotica** was employed in hymns to outline the holy birth of the Virgin Mary in Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’s *Psalmodia christina y sermoniario de los santos del año* (1583).⁵² **Teoyotica** refer here to a sacred event. Burkhart asserts that **teoyotica** was frequently exploited by the Spanish clergy as a material metaphor for the spiritual world (Burkhart 1989:85; 208, n.37). In *Sermonario en lengua Mexicana* (1577), Fray Juan de la Anunciación delineates baptism as a sacred action: *teoyotica nealtiliztli nechipauualiztli*, “to take a bath, a purifying in a sacred way.” In this context, **teoyotica** is applied to distinguish baptism from an ordinary bath, something which the Nahua probably did in their bathing rituals (Burkhart 1989:117). **Teoyotica** was also utilised by the ethnographer-missionaries for a spiritual “sweeping” (*tlachpanaliztli*) of the soul, in order to emphasise a connection between spiritual and physical purity, i.e. soul and body. The sacred (*teoyotica*) is hence separated by its purity in the hymns (Burkhart 1989:122; 125–26, 128).

De la Anunciación (1577) reports marriage as *inic teyotica nemiz*, “in order that one live in a sacred way” (Burkhart 1989:157). The concept of “religion,” **teyotica nemiz**, of the Nahua is consequently describing a holy or sacred practice of way of living. **Teoyotica Nemiliztli** is, however, not an entry in the Nahuatl-Spanish section of the dictionary of Molina. This is an indication that it was a constructed compound word so that the Spanish monks could set the “true” “religion,” Catholic Christianity, apart from the “false” indigenous “religion” in order to serve their

⁵⁰ But Burkhart does not mention that *teoyotica* was translated by Molina as part of the word compound for “religion.”

⁵¹ **Teoyotica** “could be more literally translated as ‘with sacredness.’ It implies that something is being done in accordance with divinity or through the agency of the divine” (Burkhart 1989:102).

⁵² “When the perfectly good maiden was born, Saint Mary, in a sacred way (*teoyotica*) the splendor of dawn came out” (Burkhart 1989:85, n.37).

evangelical objectives. “Religion” was a synonym for Christianity for the Spanish ethnographer-missionaries in Mesoamerica in the 16th century and therefore did not correspond with other belief and practice systems. In order to ease the mission, indigenous words were constructed through neologisms. Words could also be given a new meaning by modifications, metaphors, and by metonymy. Spanish words were integrated in the dictionaries when the indigenous language was insufficient for conveying the proper connotation to the indigenous notion. Burkhart has provided a quite good example of a strategy of paraphrasing notions which did not exist in Nahuatl. The term for “virgin” could not be found in Nahuatl. To abstain from sexual relations was valued by the Nahua. Youths, making service in the temples, lived in celibacy. They were called *mopializtli*, “keeping oneself” or *chipahuacanemiliztli ichpochtli*, “pure living.” The ethnographer-missionaries modified words like *itelpochtli* or *telpochtli*, initially used to designate girls and boys who had completed puberty, but had not achieved adulthood. These terms did not denote sexuality or social status, but became synonyms for “virgin” (Burkhart 1989:150).⁵³

The entries for “religion” in Mesoamerican languages therefore are constructions made by Spanish evangelical lexicographers in order to appeal to Mesoamerican mentality and traditions. As previously mentioned, some Spanish words were used where the indigenous language did not contain the appropriate equivalent notion. Some of the entries for “religion” appear to be paraphrased compound words. In their evangelical endeavours, the Spanish missionaries confronted a problem since many dissimilar languages were spoken in Mesoamerica. Consequently, the dictionaries and grammars of the ethnographer-missionaries had to be precise enough that the priests could use them in the catechisms, to hear confessions, administer the sacraments, and in the sermons which they held in the native language.

Language is a part of and defines a culture. It comprises idiomatic expressions, ideas and symbols. The Mesoamerican “linguistic challenge” is reflected in the early work of the ethnographer-missionaries, where there is a fusion of Christian and native terminology. Many Mesoamerican

⁵³ “To express the idea of virginity it was necessary to modify these terms with qualifiers, as in *oc uel ichpochtli* ‘still really a girl’ (Molina 1970, 1:117v), or to resort to a metaphor, such as using jade, a symbol of purity and wholeness, for a virgin girl — hence Molina’s *oc chalchiuutl* ‘still jade’ (Molina 1970, 2:75r)” (Burkhart 1989:150).

concepts proved to be untranslatable. Christian concepts were created from “synonyms” in indigenous languages. The ethnographer-missionaries could apply native terms not corresponding to Catholic orthodoxy as long as they were assured that these notions were exempt from “idolatry.” The ethnographer-missionaries preferred simple words instead of poetical metaphors and a complicated rhetoric which could conceal a non-Christian content. It was their pedagogical aspiration to write in an unsophisticated and a straightforward manner. Nevertheless, native metaphors were still used as an effective tool in the sermons. Even directly conducted translations comprised Mesoamerican denotations and connotations foreign to the Christian European notions they were supposed to render. It was therefore impossible to avoid “heathen” ideology. The clerical missionaries warn, however, against this danger in their books (Burkhart 1989:27).

In her book *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (1989) the already mentioned Louise M. Burkhart has analysed the ethnographer-missionaries efforts to introduce Catholic Christian moral concepts into Nahuatl and especially the concept of “sin” (Sp. “pecado”)⁵⁴ — based on their ethnographic and doctrinal writings (catechisms or “doctrina,” sermons or “sermonario,” manuals of confessions or “confessionario,” passages from the Bible, and other edifying scriptures translated into Nahuatl). Her study shows that the translations of the ethnographer-missionaries were performed by modifying and adapting European Christian and Nahuatl concepts. The Nahuatl word *teotl* was rendered both as “sacred” and exploited to designate the (one) Christian “God” by the ethnographer-missionaries. But this was not always the case. Fray Bernadino de Sahagún’s ethnographic work *Primeros Memoriales* equates *teotl* with “devil” (Sp. “diablo”) in the Nahuatl text (1997:70, n.3). The Spanish words “ángel” and “santo” were introduced to describe sacred individuals with a lower status (Burkhart 1989:39). A dialogue was instigated between the representatives of Christianity and the Nahuatl in the 16th century in Mexico, where the translations were applied in the mission. The ethnographic accounts

⁵⁴ The ethnographer-missionaries substituted this concept (conveying moral corruption) with the Nahuatl word *tlatlacolli*, which literally means “something damaged” (Burkhart 1989:10; 28).

of the missionaries were influenced by the aim of the mission where many aspects of the indigenous culture were ignored and misinterpreted. European cultural categories were often applied uncritically on indigenous concepts. Features of the native culture were also modified to appear acceptable. On the other hand, the indigenous assistants of the ethnographer-missionaries recorded words and expressions without changing the contents. As Burkhart emphasises, it is also quite significant that the catechists' Nahuatl texts were the results of a collaboration between the friars and their Nahua assistants, students and informants. Although under close supervision and scrutiny by the Spanish missionaries, the Nahua interpreters and scribes were responsible for a great part of the formulations of the evangelical Nahuatl texts. Consequently, these scriptures are indeed of a Nahua-Christian character (Burkhart 1989:24–25).

It was attempted to construct analogies between Catholic Christianity and native religion through dialogue, by force and by adaptation. The Spanish priests staged Catholic Christian dramas, wrote catechisms and preached the gospel in the indigenous languages. They tried to identify elements in the local belief and practice system which were comparable with Christianity. The ethnographer-missionaries sought a correspondence between their own and the native language. It was a choice between neologisms or terms from the Spanish language. Their ambition was hence a translation to promote the Christian gospel and not a philological or linguistic scientific investigation of the languages of Mesoamerica. The words were thus not always treated according to their cultural context when translated into European Christian concepts. The ethnographer-missionaries wanted to know whether the terms “God,” “sacred,” “devil” etc. existed in the native languages. It is also intriguing that nouns, but not verbs, were at first not translated into Spanish. “Religious” concepts, but not “religious” actions, accordingly had unfamiliar names in the written work by the ethnographer-missionaries (Burkhart 1989:23).

Carlos U. Robles (1964) has collected 25 Catholic concepts translated from Spanish into Nahuatl, Tarahumar (Rarámuri), Otomí, Tarasco, Zapotec, Yucatec and Tzeltal in dictionaries from the colonial period.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Roble also made a survey of 15 words in modern Tzeltal expressing Christian concepts (Robles 1964:629–31).

These are typical Christian notions like “God,” “devil,” “hell,” “sin,” “forgiveness,” “immortality,” “punishment,” “eternity,” “soul,” “faith,” “mercy,” “resurrection,” etc.⁵⁶ Robles has observed that a Christian idea is frequently described with two terms, through a loanword from Spanish and a word from the indigenous language. Some terms could be formulated through a paraphrase. Indigenous languages like Maya and Nahuatl, by adding a suffix, can quite easily construct abstract concepts. They could also do this by the use of kennings (“difrasismos”), which was a regularly applied literary technique (Robles 1964:628–29). The translations are therefore not always precise. The Spanish missionary-lexicographers gave the Mesoamerican words altered original semantics where they only transferred a partly correct meaning. Some terms also had an unknown significance, but were “loaned” to render a Christian notion.⁵⁷

There are examples of missionary efforts where the ethnographer-missionaries acknowledged that language was not a sufficient strategy.⁵⁸ The missionaries found it difficult to outline the Christian hell even if many Mesoamerican people had a conception of an underworld. The Augustinian Fray Antonio de Roa, who operated in the Otomí region of northern Mexico, believed that the “simple minds” of the natives could not be moved by words. To make the torments of the (Christian) hell intelligible he walked on hot coals, took a bath in boiling water and had himself choked and flagellated, with burning pine resin afterwards being dripped on his wounds by his native assistants. Since he did not master the native language, the Franciscan Fray Luis Caldera, working as a missionary in the province Michoacán, burned small animals in an oven alive.

⁵⁶ See also “religious” loanwords from Spanish into Tzotzil in the *Thesaurus* (Laughlin and Haviland 1988:571–73).

⁵⁷ The Franciscan Fray Andrés de Olmos (1480?–1568), perhaps the first ethnographer-missionary in Mesoamerica, wrote *Siete sermones principales sobre los siete pecados mortales* (“Seven Major Sermons on the Seven Deadly Sins”) in 1551–1552. This was a Nahuatl translation of the treatise *Sermones de peccatis capitalibus pro ut septem petitionibus orationis Dominicae opponuntur* by Vicente Ferrer and was intended to adapt to the way of thinking, traditions and language of the Nahuatl. In this book Olmos constructed words in Nahuatl to clarify nuances and particularities with the Catholic Christian Seven Deadly Sins (Baudot 1995:234–37).

⁵⁸ The Franciscans did for instance not learn the language in their mission of the Pueblo people of the Southwest of the United States in the 17th century (cf. Spicer 1962).

Their cries of pain represented the anguish of the sinners in hell (Burkhart 1989:53–54).

9. The Accounts and Interpretations of Mesoamerican Cultures by the Ethnographer-Missionaries (1500–1700)

The ethnographic-missionaries defined Mesoamerican “religion,” not only through dictionaries, but in their accounts of history and culture as well. They composed a large material outlining the culture, geography, economy, belief, ritual practice, institutions and history of the Mesoamericans. These books vary, however, in extent, thoroughness and their sympathy with the native peoples. The ethnographer-missionaries were for instance more involved in documenting “religious” ritual practices than mythology in order to expose “heathen” customs. But in what way did the ethnographer-missionaries delineate the belief system and the ritual practices of the indigenous people? Did they utilise Mesoamerican terms for “religion” in their investigations, analyses and cultural classifications in the “New Spain”?

It is indeed deplorable that nearly all the literature of the ethnographer-missionaries is written in Spanish instead of in the native languages. For instance, the Dominican Fray Diego Duran (1537–1588) is an essential source to the history, rituals and calendars of the Aztecs. Duran wrote exclusively in Spanish, but employed some Nahuatl terms. Duran does not utilise **Teoyotica Nemiliztli** or any other Nahuatl word for “religion” in his books (Durán 1967).

The most distinguished book written by an ethnographer-missionary in America is Fray Bernardino de Sahagún’s encyclopaedical *The Florentine Codex*,⁵⁹ or as he himself called it, *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España* (“A General History of the Things of New Spain”), copied in Mexico City c. 1578–1580. The Franciscan Sahagún (c. 1499–1589) arrived in Mexico in 1529, only eight years after the Spanish conquest of the Aztec empire. He acted as a missionary while gathering data about the language, culture and faith of the Aztecs. Sahagún was convinced that the

⁵⁹ *The Florentine Codex* is named after the manuscript’s present residence at Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, Italy (MS 218–220, Col. Palatina).

Christian indoctrination of the Aztecs had to be conducted in Nahuatl. The natives had to be addressed — in the Christian service, in catechisms and in confessions — in their own language, so that the missionaries could communicate the gospel. Sahagún also recognised that his own work had to outline, within a historical and ethnographical perspective, the ancient traditions in Nahuatl, in order to reveal potentially dangerous (i.e. “demonic” or “diabolical”) customs. Sahagún comments on this fact explicitly in the prologue to Book I, “About the Gods” of *The Florentine Codex* (Sahagún 1950–1982, 1:45–46). *The Florentine Codex* is an extraordinary book, not only because the data were collected and composed shortly after the European invasion. Sahagún collaborated with indigenous assistants and applied standardised questionnaires during interviews with native informants.⁶⁰ As mentioned, Sahagún wrote both in the indigenous language, Nahuatl, and in Spanish. His method was before his time. Sahagún is therefore, perhaps not without merit, called “the father of modern ethnography” (Nicholson 2002:25). Sahagún’s assistants comprised a small group of trilingual (Nahuatl, Spanish and Latin) sons of the ancient indigenous aristocracy educated at the Colegio de Santa Cruz founded in 1536 in Tlatelolco, not far from Mexico City. Sahagún and his assistants made interviews with anonymous survivors of the Aztec realm of Tepepolco (Hidalgo), Tlatelolco and Tenochtitlan about their history and culture. This indicates that the Nahua had indeed a strong influence upon what was recorded by Sahagún.⁶¹

⁶⁰ An earlier work than *The Florentine Codex* is *Primeros Memoriales* (a name given to it later by Francisco Paso y Troncoso), written by Sahagún and his four trilingual Nahua-assistants — whom Sahagún names in *The Florentine Codex* as Antonio Valeriano from Azcaputzalca Alonso Vegerano from Cuahuahtitlan, Pedro de San Buenaventura from Cuahuahtitlan and Martín Jacobita from Tlatilulco (Sahagún 1982: 55), of Colegio de Santa Cruz in Tlatilulco. *Primeros Memoriales* is based on interviews with native old aristocrats from Tepepolco, a city about 600 kilometres northwest of Mexico City, during two years (1558–1560) (Sahagún 1997:3–4). This manuscript incorporates chapters about the rituals and gods, the heaven and the underworld, government and human affairs.

⁶¹ Burkhart writes: “Though the friar’s aim was to gain more insight into Nahua culture in order to evangelize more effectively (and also to preserve useful information), it was so difficult for them to perceive it except in their own culture’s terms that the degree of understanding they were able to attain was severely limited. At the same time they simply recorded, or allowed their Nahua assistants to record, many things with little or

The Florentine Codex comprises twelve books with a prologue to each book. Every book treats a specific subject: the gods; the ceremonies; the origin of the gods; the soothsayers; the omens; rhetoric and moral philosophy; the sun, moon, and the binding of the years; the kings and the lords; the merchants; the people; earthly things and the conquest of Mexico. In his organisation of *The Florentine Codex*, Sahagún does not emphasise the Spanish (or an indigenous word) for “religion” in his narration of the beliefs, institutions and ritual system of the Nahuatl. Sahagún, whose knowledge of Nahuatl was excellent, hence does not employ “religion” or **Teoyotica Nemiliztli** as a particular analytical category to delineate and explain the cultural system of the Aztecs. “Religious” themes are, however, included in the books where especially deities, calendars and the ritual practices are meticulously well treated.

The ethnographer-missionaries made accounts about deities, mythology, rituals and symbols. They also report the natives’ “devilry” and “pact with Satan” etc., but do not draw on Mesoamerican words for “religion.” The ethnographer-missionaries distinguish “religion,” i.e. the Spanish word “religión,” as an individual category primarily for a condemnation of native mythology, rituals, deities and institutions (but also as a denomination of Catholic Christianity). The strategy and objective of the Spanish mission were to substitute the native “diabolic faith” with Christianity.⁶² There are, however, examples where anonymous natives and missionaries together made narratives of the pre-Columbian deities, faith, rituals, cosmology and mythology founded upon Mesoamerican books (codices), shortly after the conquest.⁶³ These books describe lost manuscripts surrendered to the missionaries by the Mesoamericans. The natives also produced manuscripts, but under close surveillance, containing

no alteration — other than that imposed by acculturating informants and assistants. The result is a partially Christianized ethnography, corresponding to the partially Nahuatlized Christianity that constituted the other side of the dialogue. All of the texts are ambivalent to varying degrees, combining indigenous forms of discourse with forms introduced by the friars, interweaving native and imported voices so intricately that it can become very difficult to unravel them” (Burkhart 1989:22–23).

⁶² As noted, there occurred both demonisation and efforts to create a dialogue between Catholic Christianity and Mesoamerican religion in the early phase of the mission.

⁶³ For example *Historia de los mexicanos por sus pinturas* (Garibay 1965), *Leyenda de los Soles* (Bierhorst 1992, 1998) and *Histoyre du mehicque* (de Jonghe 1905).

among other things “religious” iconography with illustrations and accounts of customs and festivals, so that the Spanish priests were able to identify “heathendom.”⁶⁴

10. The Ideal Type of “Religion” as a Cultural Analytical Concept

The concept “religion” has two fundamental perspectives: an outsider, or “etic,” and an insider, or “emic,” one.⁶⁵ This model can be employed for the assorted perceptions of the concept of “religion” in Mesoamerica:

1. The understanding of the concept of “religion” by the believers of the indigenous culture, as long as they had or have such a notion.
2. The definition and “missionised” appliance of the concept of “religion” by the Spanish ethnographer-missionaries.
3. The cultural analytical definition and utilisation of the concept of “religion” by the historian of religions in the study of the cultures and history of Mesoamerica.

The first item is an insider’s while items two and three are outsider’s perspectives on the notion of “religion” in Mesoamerica.

I have already ascertained that an emic Mesoamerican concept of “religion” cannot be found in the conserved written primary sources (i.e. outlined in the Mesoamerican writings systems). Nor can the above-mentioned examples of lexemes composed and written down in dictionaries by the Spanish ethnographer-missionaries be said to have held this meaning. Using examples from *The Alberta Elders’s Cree Dictionary*, Earle H. Waugh has stated that western emic “religious” terms or the concept of “religion” does not reflect the Cree tribe’s (of the northern part of USA and north-western part of Canada) vocabulary and notions (Waugh 2001).⁶⁶ Waugh

⁶⁴ These are the many manuscripts which were collected and copied from the middle of the 16th century.

⁶⁵ It was the linguist Kenneth L. Pike who created the concepts “emic” and “etic” derived from phonemic and phonetic. “Etic” refers to the trans-cultural or the comparative, whereas “emic” alludes to the specific or indigenous (Pike 1999). I employ these notions to separate comparative and indigenous concepts and classifications.

⁶⁶ I thank Professor Einar Thomassen, University of Bergen, for making me aware of this article.

has made numerous excellent philological observations, but goes too far when he deduces that History of Religions is thereby more or less futile as an analytic scientific discipline (Waugh 2001:489–490).

“Religion” is a European cultural category within a tradition where a secularised conception has been developed of “religion” as a distinct cultural phenomenon. To apply notions like “religion,” “culture,” “history,” “literature,” “politics,” “art” etc. implies making reflections and commentaries about one’s own way of life and ideology. These terms are incorporated into a meta-language. A meta-language is a language which describes another language. The history of religions, like other scientific disciplines, contains a meta-language or a terminology which aims to produce a general interpretation and analysis of religious systems. “Religion” is a comparative or trans-cultural analytic concept where indigenous theological terms are translated into and explained by meta-language of the history of religions. We have seen that the ethnographer-missionaries introduced Christian notions by translating them into words from Mesoamerican languages. Hence the scholar faces a problem of translation in the study of other cultures. A conscious strategy for constructing concepts is essential if valuable etic notions are to be created in the scientific meta-language. The concept of religion is a cultural category which only gives meaning, like other trans-cultural notions, if defined as what Max Weber has called an “ideal type.” An ideal type is a general concept which does not have an actual or authentic existence. Weber writes: “It is not a *description* of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description” (Weber 1969:90). By abstracting similarities or an essential similarity between particular phenomena or objects, their distinctive traits, a technical term or an ideal type arises. The purpose of establishing ideal types or analytical typologies is to be able to outline similarities, connections and differences between individual objects, individuals, phenomena etc. irrespective of time or place.

... those “ideas” which govern the behaviour of the population of a certain epoch, i.e., which are concretely influential in determining their conduct, can if a somewhat complicated construct is involved, be formulated precisely only in the form of an ideal type, since empirically it exists in the minds of an indefinite and constantly changing mass of individuals and assumes in their minds the most multifarious nuances of form and content, clarity and meaning (Weber 1969:95–96).

In order to provide meaning and enhance our understanding of cultural phenomena, it is imperative that these categorisations and classifications are formulated and employed in a precise manner. An erroneous and inaccurate cultural diagnosis has unfortunate consequences. It will obscure the perception and thereby misguide the interpretation of the empirical data. If the phenomena or objects elude classification, the scholar should always draw attention to this fact. It is my contention that we cannot avoid making use of ideal types as an analytical tool in the history of religions. Although some scholars deny that they apply ideal types in their research, language itself forces them to use this tool, consciously or unconsciously.⁶⁷ It is therefore extremely important to be attentive to the application of concepts as ideal types. Doing otherwise will lead to absurdities and unnecessary complications in our exploration of the studied phenomenon. The historian of religions confronts not only the challenge of defining “religion”; equally important is to have unambiguous notions about the demarcation of subgroups of “religious” comparative concepts. Terms like “soul,” “god,” “religious specialist,” “priest,” “mana,” “totem,” “shaman” etc. must, in order to avoid semantic problems, be formulated and defined as ideal types.⁶⁸ The overused notions of “shaman” and “shamanism” are extraordinarily good examples of the inflated use of meaningless concepts because nobody has had a clear idea of their semantic value.⁶⁹ The history of religions can in this respect learn from sociology and linguistics, scientific disciplines which have a tradition for employing clearly defined analytical trans-cultural concepts. The scholar must, however, be critical and careful in the construction and application of abstract concepts, particularly in the study of a non-western culture. A theoretical

⁶⁷ “If the historian (in the widest sense of the word) rejects an attempt to construct such ideal types as a ‘theoretical construction,’ i.e., as useless or dispensable for his concrete heuristic purposes, the inevitable consequence is either that he consciously or unconsciously uses other similar concepts without formulating them verbally and elaborating them logically or that he remains stuck in the realm of the vaguely ‘felt’” (Weber 969:94).

⁶⁸ “The greater the need however for a sharp appreciation of the significance of a cultural phenomenon, the more imperative is the need to operate with unambiguous concepts which are not only particularly but also systematically defined” (Weber 1969:93).

⁶⁹ But cf. Pharo 2001, and Pharo forthcoming a, for a deconstruction and reconstruction of the concepts of “shaman” and “shamanism” as ideal types.

classification risks obscuring characteristics of the religious system under investigation. When using universal concepts in the exploration of a specific culture or religion, the corresponding word from the language of the culture must always be considered and included. The scholar can in this manner make nuances and modify the application of the ideal type. Hence, we operate with two levels of language, a universal and a regional, which both must be regarded. In addition to applying the concept of the ideal type, the historian of religions must constantly include the studied culture's word for the phenomena, i.e. both the etic and the emic concepts. Similarities with phenomena from other religions (which it is the task of a comparative discipline like the history of religions to look for) must not obscure the differences. Even when we find similarities between cultural phenomena, there will always be essential dissimilarities. If the historian of religions ignores this fact, he/she runs the peril of obscuring and simplifying reality, which is not only scientifically unfortunate, but unfair and an insult to the people of the culture studied. Comparative concepts are only tools for formulating interpretations and gaining deeper understanding. The ideal-type is never an aim in itself (Weber 1969:201–2). One must therefore always be on guard against the risk of distorting the empirical data to make it fit into a theory and an apparatus of concepts. When a scientific definition of a phenomenon is sought, it is essential to emphasise what distinguishes it from other phenomena, but also to identify one or several analogies from assorted cultures and historical epochs. Where an observable fact appears to share common essential qualities, the scholar can operate with an ideal type. The ideal type will, however, never be finally defined in a cultural scientific discipline, but must be constantly subjected to critical scrutiny.

But how can we define “religion” as an ideal type? Let me return to what I wrote in the introduction to this essay. Instead of using the dichotomy of conceptions, “holy”/“sacred” versus “profane,” terms strongly associated with a Christian paradigm, I prefer to stress the non-human/non-natural aspect in defining religious phenomena. The supernatural or non-human is integrated within the cultural system of a non-differentiated pre-modern society. Religion pervades and transcends all aspects of society and the life of the individual. The preternatural comprises not just a conception about the world, cultural traditions and cardinal values, but art, handicraft, architecture, city planning, economy, politics, the family/

clan etc. as well. It therefore should be no surprise that a particular system of “religion” was not regarded as a detached sphere by the Mesoamericans. Is it therefore futile to operate with the etic notion “religion” when analysing Mesoamerican cultures?

Mesoamerican languages express that human beings and the human natural world are radically dissimilar from religious phenomena. For instance, Nahuatl and Maya-languages distinguish between deities or supernatural beings on the one hand, and people with preternatural qualities and ordinary human beings on the other. These languages also differentiate “the human world” and “non-human worlds.” Some institutions and structures are designed to have a “religious” status and to serve “religious” functions. In addition, time can be considered to be either mythical (non-human) or historical (human).

Yucatec-Maya make a distinction between humans called *winik*, “hombre” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:923) and deities, *k’u*, “dios” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:416). Nahuatl does likewise; there the human being, *tlacatl*, “hombre” (Molina 1977:115)⁷⁰ is contrasted with gods, *teutl*, “dios” (Molina 1977:112). There are also many designations of various supernatural beings which were discriminated from humans. Nevertheless, people can “become deities” by ritually impersonating them. These states of impersonation had a particular categorisation — *an/anum* in the logosyllabic inscriptions of the Classic Maya (Houston and Stuart 1996) and *ixiptlatli* in Nahuatl sources (Hvidtfeldt 1958) — consequently expressing that an impersonation was taking place. But as several studies show, as summarised by Cecelia Klein (2001a, 2001b), divinity resides in the costume and the mask of the impersonator and not in the human wearer. The human impersonator is only the representative and does not become the deity itself even if he/she is temporarily conceived as empowered by or embodying a divine essence during the ritual. Particular people and deities who share an essential preternatural quality in Mesoamerica, namely the ability to undergo a transformation into animals or natural phenomena at their own will, are called *ah way*, “brujo”; “nigromántico”; “encantador” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:916) in certain Maya-languages⁷¹ and

⁷⁰ Cf. López Austin 1996:201–6 on the Nahuatl notion of *tlacatl*.

⁷¹ Cf. Houston and Stuart 1989; and Pharo forthcoming a, forthcoming b.

naualli (*nawalli*), “bruxa” (Molina 1977:63) in Nahuatl.⁷² But this type of religious specialist cannot be considered equal to the gods because this is the only quality he/she has in common with them. Neither can the intriguing Mesoamerican phenomenon which Alfredo López Austin (1973) has called “hombres-dios” (man-gods),⁷³ where some kind of divine force has penetrated exceptional human beings (López Austin 1973:121–23), upset the categorical distinction of deity versus man. We do not have a concept for this phenomenon in Mesoamerican languages. Some of these “hombres-dios,” or powerful historical individuals, actually became deities through a later apotheosis, thereby changing their identity from humans into gods, a fact that confirms the Mesoamerican human versus deity classification.

Both the *teocalli*, “casa de dios, iglesia” (Molina 1977:100) (“house of deity”) of the Aztecs and the *y-otot k’uh*, “house of deity” (Stuart 1998) of the Classic Maya were particular designations of structures dedicated to deities.

The earth, *kab*, “el mundo”; “pueblo o region” (Barrera Vásquez 1980:277) (Maya), or *tlalticpac*, “el mundo, o en el mundo, o encima de tierra” (Molina 1977:125) (Nahuatl) are divorced in the language from the underworld, *xibalba* (Tedlock 1996; Christenson 2000; Ajpacajá Tum *et al.* 2001:497) (Maya) and *mictlan*, “infierno” (Molina 1977:56) (Nahuatl).⁷⁴ In addition, the Aztecs made a distinction in their language between their world located in the Valley of Mexico, designated as Anáhuac⁷⁵ or Cemanáhuac,⁷⁶ and a mythic place, Aztlán, from where they originated.

⁷² The signs for *winik/winal*, *k’uh* and *way* are written in the logosyllabic language system of the Classic Maya, where they were spelled both syllabically and with logograms.

⁷³ Cf. also Gruzinski 1992.

⁷⁴ See also the Nahua-concept of the cosmological places Tamoanchan and Tlalocan (López Austin 1997).

⁷⁵ The word *anáhuac* derives from *atl*, “water” and *nahuac*, “near.” It is translated as “near the water” or “coast.” *Anáhuac* refers to the costal regions of the Pacific and Gulf, to the island cities, the Valley of Mexico and to the Mexican nation. The Nahua of Central Mexico conceived the earth as a disc or as a caiman surrounded by water (Berdan 2001:15).

⁷⁶ Cf. *cemanahuatl* (“the world”) in Karttunen (1983:29) and *cemanáhuac* in Berdan (2001:15).

Moreover, there was a conception of three parallel worlds, the underworld, the earth and the sky (upper world) in Mesoamerica. For example, people of Central Mexico believed that there were 9 levels of the underworld and 9 or 13 levels of the upper world where the highest sphere was *Omeyoacan*, “place of duality.” Deities and spirits could in principle reside in all these three worlds, whereas humans could only exist on earth. Apart from this linguistic distinction between natural and supernatural space, there was also an indigenous dichotomy between a historical and a mythical concept of time where the human beings could be present only in the current time era or world age (León-Portilla 1963; Nicholson 1971; López Austin 1993; 1996; 1997; Pharo forthcoming, 2007b).

A linguistic polarisation between the human as opposed to the non-human/non-natural is accordingly a reasonable semantic point of departure for a definition of “religion” and for applying this concept in a cultural analysis.⁷⁷ As a scientific discipline, the history of religions must comprise an apparatus of comparative concepts, theories and methods for interpretation and analysis. But cultural analysis without a philological methodology and knowledge of the language of the studied culture has no credibility. “Religion” constitutes an analytical perspective in order to examine human experiences and practices, ways of life and views of the world. In this manner, the character of “religion” is contextual and comprises not only an ideology or a mental activity. Consequently, a contact with the preternatural or non-human has political, economical, social and judicial⁷⁸ implications and impacts. “Religion” has therefore indeed indispensable functional aspects which are essential to investigate.

⁷⁷ I disagree with Monaghan who maintains that a monistic or even a pantheistic (!) Mesoamerican principle of divinity makes the categories “natural” versus “supernatural” insupportable as analytical tools (cf. Monaghan 2000:26–28). As indicated by the above mentioned examples, the native languages demonstrate that a hypothesis of a Mesoamerican religious monism or pantheism cannot be upheld. But this does not imply that Mesoamerican religious systems had or have a Judeo-Christian dualistic orientation. Mesoamerican ontology is, however, a very complicated philosophical issue, which can only be treated as a subject of its own.

⁷⁸ The following story from modern Mexico can illustrate the influence of religion on a judicial process. A religious specialist who can transform him or herself into a natural phenomenon or an animal is called a “nagual” in Mesoamerica. “Nagual” is derived from the Nahuatl-word, *nawalli*. It is accounted that the “H-men” (i.e. a religious specialist

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among the Yucatec of Yucatan in Mexico) Don Felipe Paz of Tecoh, who was also a nagual, was shot by a neighbour at the beginning of the 1970s. The neighbour was, however, acquitted by the court since he claimed that he had shot a cat on his own kitchen roof. The man was not aware that the cat in reality was the manifestation or apparition of Don Felipe as a nagual (*Vay Miz* [cf. Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934:178–89]) until the animal, during the death struggle, transformed himself back to his human form (Bolles 1982:68). In this case the court of justice has accepted that human beings can transform into an animal. This phenomenon, which “western” administrations of justice would categorise as a preternatural incident, has hence been admitted by the tribunal in order to acquit the neighbour of all guilt. The religious phenomenon, nagualism, has therefore had a decisive impact on the outcome of the judicial process.

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The Turkish Contribution to the History of Religions

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Abstract

This article has as its subject researches in the field of history of religions in Turkey and describes a tradition that started in 1912 and has undergone a developmental process of its own up until today. This study evaluates, based on scholarly theses, published articles and books, an academic mentality which was initiated by Annemarie Schimmel and was further developed by Hikmet Tanyu and his students. It also classifies the studies in the field conducted in Turkey with examples and draws attention to the difficulties concerning the method employed. This article, moreover, provides information about the scholarly activities of the Turkish Association for the History of Religions, which was founded in 1994 with the purpose of improving the communication between Turkish historians of religions and establishing a closer dialogue with their Western colleagues.

Keywords

History of religions, Turkey, Hikmet Tanyu

The information age we live in allows people to obtain more information about each other and those who are well-informed are taking a greater interest in other cultures, faiths, ways of life and notions about the future. This developing intercultural dialogue has stimulated scholarly studies, including the growing interest in the study of religions (“Religious Science”) and particularly in “the history of religions.” In the modern world, there is a desire to learn more systematically not only about one’s own beliefs, but also about those of others; a desire to learn everything about a religion from its pillars to its symbols. Those who want to understand the changing world feel a need to be informed about the contents

of scriptures of the great religions. For this reason, the history of religions has gained special importance throughout the world and interest in this field has been constantly increasing.

Geographically, historically, culturally and geo-strategically, Turkey has been considered a bridge between the West and the East. In this context, scholarly works produced in Turkey should be seen as having a bridging function in keeping with that role. Thus, it would be a mistake to consider such studies, especially in the field of social science, independent of Turkey's distinctive features and its international position.

Turkish studies in the field of the history of religions in Turkey have not been independent of Turkish cultural history, Turkish religious history, Turkish public faiths and the Turkish people's needs; nor have they been closed to the developments in the world and to other religions. In this sense, studies in the history of religions in Turkey have kept pace with international developments. It is possible to summarize this development in four phases as follows: the early activities when the history of religions was taught in educational institutions, the first academic studies in the field, the recent academic developments, and the scholarly activities of the Turkish Association for the History of Religions.

Early Activities in the History of Religions in Turkey

The chronicle of the history of religions in Turkey begins in 1912. However, a number of documents are of earlier date, including the abridged translation of Sharhrastânî's *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*¹ and other studies like *Qisas al-Anbiyâ* (*Tales of the Prophets*)² and *Asâtîr* (*Legends*).³ The history of religions tradition in the Islamic World, which started in the 4th/10th century, ceased for a time from the 7th/12th centuries. In contrast, discussions regarding "the origin of religion" started in the West in the second half of the 19th century and this was generally explained in terms of concepts such as animism, naturalism, totemism, ancestor

¹ See al-Shahrastânî, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, abridged and translated by Nuh b. Mustafa, 1649.

² See Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, *Qisas Anbiyâ*, Istanbul 1985.

³ Şemseddin Sami, *Asâtîr*, Istanbul 1311.

worship, fetishism, and magic. In the West, various books were written expounding these theories as they became fashionable, which served to keep this topic on the agenda and stimulate discussion.⁴

These developments caused a new branch of science to emerge in the West entitled the history of religions. Parallel with this, similar developments were taking place in the Turkish world after the Second Constitutional era, and “the History of Religions” became a university course.⁵ In connection with these courses, books in this field began to be published.⁶ Although some living religions were discussed in the books, their contents mainly focused on the various theories explaining the origin of religion and critiques of these.⁷ After 1935, a number of studies were also published in this field to inform the public about various religions.⁸ The history of religions course was included in the curriculum of the Divinity Faculty, which was opened in 1949 at Ankara University. In the textbook *The History of Religions* by Himli Ömer Budda, the major religions included were the Indian, and Chinese and Japanese religions. Budda discussed the issues from the perspective of the “Turkish Thesis of History” and tried to establish a connection between these religions and the Turks. This work was followed by *Yeryüzündeki Dinler Tarihi* (“The History of the World’s Religions”) by Ömer Rıza Doğrul; written without any references, this has been considered a popular book, intended to give to the average reader some general information about the living religions.⁹

It is not possible to regard works like the *Qisas Anbiyâ* and *Asâtîr* simply as texts in the field of the history of religions. However, these works may be indirectly linked to the field, in so far as they may be regarded as

⁴ See Mircea Eliade, *Dinin Anlamı ve Sosyal Fonksiyonu*, translated by Mehmet Aydın, Ankara 1990, 12–58.

⁵ See Hikmet Tanyu, “Türkiye’de Dinler Tarihi’nin Tarihçesi”, *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 8 (1961) 109–111.

⁶ See Ahmed Mithat Efendi, *Târih Adyân*, İstanbul 1327; Mahmud Esad Emin b. Seydişehri, *Târih Adyân*, Darsaadat 1330–1333; Esad, *Târih Adyân*, Darsaadet 1336; M. Şemseddin Günaltay, *Tarih-i Edyan*, Darsaadat 1338.

⁷ Abdurrahman Küçük, “Türkiye’de Dinler Tarihi Çalışmaları ve Prof. Dr. Hikmet Tanyu,” *Erciyes Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 5 (1994) 21.

⁸ See Hilmi Ömer Buda, *Dinler Tarihi*, İstanbul 1935; Ömer Rıza Doğrul, *Yeryüzündeki Dinler Tarihi*, İstanbul 1947.

⁹ A. Küçük, op. cit., 22.

starting points for the history of religions since they dealt with some issues in this field.¹⁰ The *Târikh Adyân* works on the history of religions written prior to 1947 were “general” in terms of content, and suffered from a lack of method and verifiable information.¹¹ These deficiencies may be condoned in view of the situation at the time and the lack of sources.

Studies in the history of religions took on a more modern perspective from 1954 onwards, when the German scholar Annemarie Schimmel began to teach the history of religions at Ankara University. She published a book in Turkish entitled *Dinler Tarihine Giriş* (“Introduction to the History of Religions”) in 1955. The book touched upon almost all living religions, except Islam, and also some religions of the past.¹² The most important feature of the book was a chapter at the end dedicated to “religious terms.”¹³ In 1960, Felicien Challaye’s book, *The History of Religions*, was translated into Turkish under the title *Dinler Tarihi*.¹⁴ This book had many features in common with other works in this field in Turkey with regard to contents and methods. In 1966, Mehmet Taplamacıoğlu, a sociologist of religion, published *Karşılaştırmalı Dinler Tarihi* (“A Comparative History of Religions”).¹⁵ In this work, some information was included on the ancient religions of the Arabs, Amer-Indians, Europeans, Asians, Egyptians, Indians and Chinese, as well as on Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and on methodology in the field of the history of religions. Although some partial comparisons were made, it is not possible to regard this work as a purely comparative study.¹⁶

The First Academic Studies in the History of Religions in Turkey

Turkish studies in the history of religions took a new direction from 1960 onwards. From then on, the history of religions became a scholarly disci-

¹⁰ A. Küçük, op. cit., 22.

¹¹ See H. Tanyu, op. cit., 112–13, 120–23.

¹² See Annemarie Schimmel, *Dinler Tarihine Giriş*, Ankara 1955.

¹³ See Schimmel, op. cit., 151–256.

¹⁴ See Felicien Challaye, *Dinler Tarihi*, Çev. Samih Tiryakioğlu, İstanbul 1960.

¹⁵ See Mehmet Taplamacıoğlu, *Karşılaştırmalı Dinler Tarihi*, Ankara 1966.

¹⁶ A. Küçük, op. cit., 23.

pline and began to develop beyond a general interest in this field to focus on some specific phenomena. The emergence of this new understanding and its further development is due largely to the works of Professor Hikmet Tanyu. After completing his doctorate in 1959 in Turkey under the supervision of Professor Schimmel, Professor Tanyu turned his attention from the general field to focus on Turkish religious history. His doctoral thesis *Ankara ve Çevresinde Adak ve Adak Yerleri* (“Votive Practices and Votive Places in and around Ankara”) may be considered the first example of this new focus and method.¹⁷ After Schimmel’s return to her homeland, Hikmet Tanyu became the leading scholar in the field. His post-doctoral study entitled *Türklerde Taşla İlgili İnançlar* (“Stone Related Beliefs of the Turks”)¹⁸ was a phenomenological study. In *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları* (“Studies in the History of Religions”), published in 1973, he discussed Turkish beliefs related to mountains.¹⁹ This work was, in brief, a consideration of Turkey from the perspective of the history of religions.

Tanyu also studied Judaism, Zionism and Freemasonry, in connection with his specialization in national and religious issues, as well as drawing attention to the missionary activities of groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses and Baha’i in Turkey. He published *Yehova Şahitleri* (“Jehovah’s Witnesses”) in 1973,²⁰ in which he declared the members of this sect a danger for Turkey and the Turks. He was of the opinion that this group constituted a Christian sect which was strongly influenced by Judaism and was antagonistic to the authority of Turkish government, as well as that of İslam. Furthermore, Tanyu asserted that Bahaism was an iconoclastic movement supported by imperialist powers,²¹ which was trying to establish the link between the Jews and the Turks, and the movements related to Judaism. In connection with this, he composed an encyclopedic work of two volumes entitled *Tarih Boyunca Yahudiler ve Türkler*

¹⁷ Hikmet Tanyu, *Ankara ve Çevresinde Adak ve Adak Yerleri*, Ankara 1967.

¹⁸ Hikmet Tanyu, *Türklerde Taşla İlgili İnançlar*, Ankara 1968.

¹⁹ Hikmet Tanyu, *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları*, Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, Ankara 1973.

²⁰ Hikmet Tanyu, *Yehova Şahitleri*, Ankara 1973.

²¹ Küçük, “Prof. Dr. Hikmet Tanyu’nun Hayatı, Eserleri ve Fikirleri,” *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 36 (1997) 504.

(“Jews and Turks throughout History”)²² in which he followed a chronological approach.

Tanyu then published a work entitled *Türklerin Dini Tarihçesi* (“The Religious History of the Turks”) in 1978.²³ The continuity characteristic of Turkish political history is also evident in Turkish religious history. Although the historians regarded religion only as a historical phenomenon, Tanyu asserted that religion was more than history; that, as set of beliefs, practices and a set of moral values, it went beyond history. He also made these claims in another work, *İslamlıktan Önce Türklerde Tek Tanrı İnancı* (“Monotheism among the Turks before Islam”).²⁴ In the latter book, Tanyu also claimed that the old religion of the Turks was monotheistic. He went on to address two common mistakes found in earlier works discussing the old religion of the Turks: one mistake was to consider the spiritual beliefs of Altay and Yağut to constitute old Turkish religion as a whole; the other was to regard the old religion of the Turks as shamanism. Contrary to the general assumption, it has been clearly proven by Western scholars such as Eliade, Couliano and van Gennep, as well as contemporary Turkish scholars, that shamanism was not a religion.²⁵ Tanyu put considerable effort into establishing the history of religions as a scholarly and noteworthy branch of academia. He avoided the tendency of Western scholarship to base the origin of religions on particular theories, arguing that the origin of religion lay in a divine source and depended on “monotheism,” and calling for profound and comprehensive studies of this issue. Tanyu, through his studies on popular beliefs and the old religion of the Turks, corrected another misunderstanding: he rejected the definitions of shamanism developed by Abdülkadir İnan and of Toyunism by Ziya Gökalp in connection with the old religion of the Turks.

According to Tanyu, although Turkish tribes practiced a variety of different religions — such as the Buddhism of Tobas, the Christianity of the Gagavuzs, and the Karaism of the Khazars — the main body had practiced the old Turkish religion before converting to Islam. In addition,

²² See Hikmet Tanyu, *Tarih Boyunca Yahudiler ve Türkler*, 2 vols., İstanbul 1976.

²³ See Hikmet Tanyu, *Türklerin Dini Tarihçesi*, İstanbul 1978.

²⁴ Hikmet Tanyu, *İslamlıktan Önce Türklerde Tek Tanrı İnancı*, Ankara 1980.

²⁵ Harun Güngör, “Dinler Tarihçisi Olarak Prof. Dr. Hikmet Tanyu ve Türk Dini Tarihi Çalışmalarına Katkısı,” *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 36 (1997) 526–527.

Tanyu criticized *The Thirteenth Tribe: The Khazar Empire and its Heritage* by Arthur Koestler, which was considered a great historical discovery in some circles in Turkey. This book focused on the relations between the Khazars and other states, and highlighted the differences between Karaism, which Koestler claimed was not a completely Jewish sect, and Orthodox Judaism. Tanyu accused Koestler of intentionally distorting the facts.²⁶ In yet another work, entitled *Nuh'un Gemisi-Ağrı Dağı Ermenileri* (“Noah’s Ark — The Armenians of Mount Ararat”), Tanyu discussed the issue of the Armenians and addressed some deliberate distortions of the facts by Armenians.²⁷

Another major contribution in this field by Tanyu was in the training of scholars who would carry on the scholarly attitude and academic studies he had launched. Indeed, Tanyu was the first professor of the history of religions whose academic career in the field was centered in Turkey. From 1968 onwards, he, in collaboration with his assistants and doctoral students, made valuable contributions to the field. While lecturing in the Department of the History of Religions of the Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University, Tanyu also trained a number of religious historians; Professors Günay Tümer, Mehmet Aydın and Abdurrahman Küçük are among the first to come to mind. He also supervised the doctoral theses of Professors Harun Güngör and Ekrem Sarıkçıoğlu; although Sarıkçıoğlu took his doctorate in Germany, he worked closely with Tanyu. Tanyu motivated these scholars in their doctoral and post-doctoral studies and made considerable contributions to their training in terms of information, experience, perspective and method.

Recent Developments in the History of Religions in Turkey

When the academic studies conducted in the field of the history of religions in Turkey are examined, it is evident that the Faculties of Divinity in Ankara, Istanbul, Konya, Bursa, Kayseri, Samsun and Erzurum hold leading positions. The historians of religions have expressed the desire that those doing research in this field should maintain closer contact with each other and exchange ideas about the subjects to be studied. Likewise,

²⁶ Harun Güngör, op. cit., 527–528.

²⁷ Hikmet Tanyu, *Nuh'un Gemisi-Ağrı Dağı Ermenileri*, İstanbul 1989.

the main purpose of the symposium that was held in Samsun 24–25 September, 1992, and entitled “The First History of Religions Research”, was to consider issues relating to the study of the history of religions in Turkey: to make these studies more effective, to consult about the problems facing the field, and to expand the horizons of young scholars working in this field. The meeting revealed that the subjects to be studied had not been covered systematically, and that similar studies had frequently been carried out on the same subjects. Although some participants claimed that it could be beneficial for the same subject to be studied by different persons, others maintained that it was a waste of time to study the same subjects using the same sources and applying same methods.²⁸ It was evident that such problems could be attributed to a lack of an overall plan in choosing research topics, and to the qualifications of the candidates such as a lack of linguistic skills and difficulties accessing important sources.

In the studies produced in the field of the history of religions in Turkey, the contributions made by academics who follow in Hikmet Tanyu's footsteps have played an important role, especially in the developments since the 1980s. Historians of religion educated by Sarıkçıoğlu, Tümer, Aydın, Küçük, Güngör, Harman and Kuzgun have produced successful studies on problematic subjects, content and methods. Although most of them completed their theses in Turkey, some of them prepared their theses in Western universities, returning to Turkey with a substantial body of knowledge, experience and data. The academics in this field have also improved their knowledge of Western languages, of classical languages and of methodology. This knowledge has not only contributed to the spiral of success, but has also augmented international communication with Western colleagues.

Professor Sarıkçıoğlu was the first Turkish scholar to complete his doctoral thesis abroad in the field of the history of religions. Entitled *Die Institution des Scheyhülislam im Osmanischen Staat*, his thesis was written at the University of Erlangen in Germany. Sarıkçıoğlu's contributions to the field are significant for several reasons. Although Sarıkçıoğlu wrote his doctorate abroad, his close contact with Hikmet Tanyu meant that he

²⁸ See. A. Küçük, “Türkiye’de Dinler Tarihi Sahasında Yapılacak Çalışmalar Üzerine Düşünceler,” *Türkiye I. Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları Sempozyumu* (24–25 Eylül 1992), Samsun 1992, 109–115.

maintained that tradition and expanded it with the scholarly experience and intellectual breadth that he gained abroad. Moreover, Sarıkçıoğlu has also passed on his knowledge of the subjects and of methodology to students doing theses under his supervision.

In his work entitled *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Dinler Tarihi* (“The History of Religions from the Beginning to the Present Day”) (Istanbul 1983), Sarıkçıoğlu employed a distinctive method and found support for his arguments in sources written in other languages. This book is used as a textbook in the history of religions at the Faculties of Divinity in Turkey. His work *Dinlerde Mehdi İnancı ve Tasavvurları* (“Mahdi Belief and Imagination in Religions”) was published in 1976. Further examples of his contributions to the field are his publications on such matters as the pre-historical beliefs of Anatolia, idolatry, Noah and the Flood in the light of the Qur’an, archaeology, scientology, a work on apocryphal gospels about the childhood of Jesus in Christianity, and New Religious Movements.²⁹ His most recent work is on phenomenology.³⁰

Professor Günay Tümer’s scholarship in this field also warrants discussion. He was the first scholar to work in the field of the comparative history of religions in Turkey. In his thesis, which was published under the title *Biruni’ye Göre Dinler ve İslam Dini* (“Religions and Islam According to al-Biruni”), he compared issues such as light, the common people, spirit, the Trinity, heaven, hell, scripture and sacrifice.³¹ In this study, he employed not only the descriptive method but also the comparative. Tümer examined in detail the difficult works of al-Biruni, and compared the Arabic original with English translations. Tümer also brought the works of al-Biruni, who was well-known internationally, to the attention of the Turkish public.³²

²⁹ His other publications are *Dinlerde Yükseliş Motifleri* (“The Rising Motifs in Religions”), Ankara 1996, and *Dinlerde Mehdi Tasavvurları* (“Mahdi Imaginations in Religions”), Samsun 1997. His work *Başlangıçtan Günümüze Dinler Tarihi* has been republished in a second edition in Isparta in 1999.

³⁰ See Ekrem Sarıkçıoğlu, *Din Fenomenolojisi* (“Phenomenology of Religion”), Isparta 2004.

³¹ See Günay Tümer, *Biruni’ye Göre Dinler ve İslam Dini*, Ankara 1991.

³² A. Küçük, “Prof. Dr. Günay Tümer, Eserleri ve Türkiye Dinler Tarihine Katkıları,” *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları I, Dinler Tarihi Derneği Yayınları*, Ankara 1998, 112.

Another of Tümer's contributions to the field was the method he followed in his book entitled *Dinler Tarihi* ("The History of Religions"), which was written in collaboration with Professor Abdurrahman Küçük. Through this book, he set out to change the negative view of the history of religions that prevailed in Turkey, and to make people understand the necessity and the significance of this subject. In his discussion of Judaism and Christianity, he also explained the Qur'anic point of view. At the end of book, he made comparisons regarding the faith, worship and place of worship in religions. In this way, he was able to demonstrate that it is possible to combine the historical, descriptive, comparative and phenomenological methods in the study of the history of religions.³³

Professor Mehmet Aydın is another academic who made significant contributions to the studies in the history of religions. Aydın produced his doctoral thesis under the supervision of Professor Hikmet Tanyu and worked as his assistant, and Tanyu's views are reflected in his approach and in the subject and method selected in the works he has supervised. His post-doctoral publication *Müslümanların Hristiyanlara Karşı Yazdığı Reddiyeler ve Tartışma Konuları* ("The Refutations written by Muslims against Christians and the Disputed Subjects") has been an important text in this field, particularly in relation to Muslim-Christian polemics. This work was published first in 1989 in Konya, then in 1998 in Ankara.³⁴

Aydın's contributions to the history of religions fall into several categories. His writings on Christianity and his numerous articles are examples of his contributions to this field. The emphasis he has placed on Western Christianity is an important point to be noted. He has drawn attention to the Christian Councils and particularly to the Second Vatican Council, and this has paved the way for subsequent works on this subject. Aydın was also responsible for drawing attention to Western writing in the fields of the history of religions and religious sciences, particularly texts on methodology, and he has translated many into Turkish.³⁵ His translations,

³³ See Günay Tümer-Abdurrahman Küçük, *Dinler Tarihi, Ocak Yayınları*, 2nd edition, Ankara 1993.

³⁴ See Mehmet Aydın, *Müslümanların Hristiyanlara Karşı Yazdığı Reddiyeler ve Tartışma Konuları*, Konya 1989.

³⁵ See Mircea Eliade, *Dinin Anlamı ve Sosyal Fonksiyonu*, tr. Mehmet Aydın, Konya 1995.

particularly of the works by Mircea Eliade, are highly valued compared to translations by non-specialists.

Professor Abdurrahman Küçük, who is currently head of the Turkish Association for the history of religions, has also contributed to the study of the history of religions in Turkey in a number of ways. Having worked as an assistant to Hikmet Tanyu, he has followed Tanyu in stressing the importance of sensitivity to criteria in selecting thesis subjects and priorities. He has sustained Tanyu's tradition in several respects: in his emphasis on the importance of selecting research subjects in the history of religions in Turkey that are necessary and relevant to the country; in his insistence on proper methodological criteria; and in his stress on the need to keep a close watch on the works being produced in the West. Küçük argued that specialists in the field must be proficient in at least one classical language and one Western language, and must make maximum use of primary sources in order to do serious work at an academic level.

The impact of these principles is clear in the theses Küçük has supervised in the choice of subject and method, and the originality. Over the years he has suggested a variety of relevant research topics for continued study both in Ankara and other universities in Turkey, and has conducted highly valued research himself. Under the tutelage of Hikmet Tanyu, Küçük obtained his doctoral degree in 1978 with a thesis entitled *Sabatay Sevi ve Cemaati Üzerine Bir Araştırma* ("A Survey on Sabatay Zwi and his Community"). The fact that the Sabatayists are still a subject of interest indicates the originality of this thesis. This work was first published as *Dönmelik ve Dönmeler Tarihi* ("The History of Jewish Conversion and Converts"), and in the following five editions Küçük has revised and expanded the text, and included references to further sources.³⁶ It is still the most serious Turkish study carried out on this subject.

Küçük's other major contribution to the field is his work on the Armenians.³⁷ He presents the Armenian Church as an institution that grew up in a distinctive geographical region and combined elements from Hayg, Persian, Greek, Turkish and Georgian cultures. According to Küçük, the Gregorian Armenian Church therefore has an identity separate from that

³⁶ See Abdurrahman Küçük, *Dönmeler (Sabatayistler) Tarihi* ("The History of Jewish Converts [Sabatayists]"), 6th edition, Ankara 2003.

³⁷ See Abdurrahman Küçük, *Ermeni Kilisesi ve Türkler*, Ankara 1997.

of the Orthodox Church, even though it is included among the Western churches. Because of the originality of its subject matter, method and sources, this work made a significant contribution to the history of religions. So did his many other books, articles and translations, among them a book written in collaboration with Günay Tümer entitled *Dinler Tarihi* (“The History of Religions”), which has proved to be a valuable source book and textbook, particularly with regard to methodology. Küçük insists that the history of religions must be carried out in close cooperation with other fields, especially the religious sciences, and emphasizes that theses must be original in subject matter and not repetitions of work already done.

Küçük also contributes to the study of the history of religions in Turkey through his engagement in the Turkish Association for the History of Religions. One of the issues that he has emphasized time and time again in various scholarly meetings is the importance of coordination and close cooperation with regard to research, theses and scholarly activities in the field. His concern about this matter has had a significant impact on research, first in Ankara and then in divinity faculties throughout the country. Recently, Küçük has focused on the traditional and contemporary understandings of mission in his research, and he is about to issue a book on this topic.

Another Turkish scholar who has contributed to the history of religions and won international acclaim for his research is Professor Harun Güngör. His studies of Turkish religious history have expanded both the methodological foundation and the primary sources available for studies related to Turkey and the Turkic World. Güngör completed his doctoral thesis, entitled *Gagauzların Dini İnanışları Üzerine Bir Araştırma* (“A Study of the Religious Beliefs of the Gagauzs”) under the supervision of Tanyu, and is one of the historians of religions who keep up the Tanyu tradition.

Professor Ömer Faruk Harman’s most important contribution to the studies of the history of religions in Turkey, has been his research on the Holy Books. Harman completed his doctoral thesis in 1983, entitled *Dinler Tarihi Açısından Şehristani ve el-Milel ve’n-Nihal* (“al-Shahristani and al-Milal wa al-Nihal in Terms of the History of Religions”). He then focused on the Torah and the Gospels and set an example for other works in this field with his discussions of text, content and sources. Another major contribution of Harman was the revision of all the entries and con-

cepts related to the history of religions in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (*İslam Ansiklopedisi*) published by the Turkish Religious Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı) (1988–).

Another scholar who has made a significant contribution to the history of religions is Professor Şaban Kuzgun. His doctoral thesis, *Hazar ve Karay Türkleri-Türklerde Yahudilik ve Doğu Avrupa Yahudilerinin Menşei Meselesi* (“Khazar and Karay Turkish-Judaism among Turks and the Problem of the Origin of the East European Jews”) (1985) was the first of many texts by this author. Other of his works which have contributed to the development of methodology and exploration of new sources include *İslam Kaynaklarına Göre Hz. İbrahim ve Hanıflık* (“Abraham and the True Religion/el-Hanafiya according to Islamic Sources”) (Kayseri 1985), *Hazar ve Karay Türkleri* (“Khazar and Karay Turks”) (Ankara 1993), *Dört İncil: Yazılması, Derlenmesi, Muhtevası, Farklılıkları ve Çelişkileri* (“The Four Gospels: Their Writing Down, Composition, Contents, Differences and Contradictions”) (Ankara 1996).

The first professor of the next generation in the history of religions is Professor Mustafa Erdem. His doctoral thesis *Yahudilik, Hristiyanlık ve İslam’da Hz. Adem* (“Adam in Judaism, Christianity and Islam”) is an example of the comparative studies undertaken in the history of religions in Turkey. Under the title *Yahudilik, Hristiyanlık ve İslam’da Hz. Adem*, this was first published in 1993, to be followed by four subsequent reprints. Erdem has continued his comparative studies of religions in various articles on a variety of subjects.³⁸

Professor Baki Adam is a scholar who has become known for his studies on Judaism. He completed his doctoral thesis, *Yahudi Kaynaklarına Göre Tevrat ve Yahudi Hayatındaki Yeri* (“Torah and Its Place in Jewish Life According to Jewish Sources”), under the supervision of Professor Küçük in 1994. This work is noteworthy both for its method and its use of sources, and for its clarifying approach to the problem of change (*tahrîf*).³⁹

³⁸ See Mustafa Erdem, “İlahi Dinlerin Kutsal Kitaplarında Helal ve Haram Anlayışı Üzerine Bir Araştırma” (“A Study of the Halâl and Harâm Understandings in the Holy Books of Divine Religions”), *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 37 (1997) 151–173.

³⁹ See Baki Adam, *Yahudi Kaynaklarına Göre Tevrat* (“Torah According to Jewish Sources”), Seba Yayınları, Ankara 1997.

Professor Şinasi Gündüz completed his postgraduate studies abroad, and his thesis was published by Oxford University Press in 1994 under the title *The Knowledge of Life: The Origins and Early History of the Mandaeans and Their Relations to the Sabians of the Qur'an and to the Harranians*. This was a valuable addition to the history of religions with respect to subject, method and sources, and was published in Turkish in 1995 under the title *Sabiiler — Son Gnostikler* (“Sabians — The Last Gnostics”).

In 1992, Professor Ahmet Güç completed his doctoral thesis entitled *İlahi Dinlerde Mabet* (“The Temple in Divine Religions”). This work is an excellent example of the comparative studies being produced in Turkey in this field.⁴⁰

Another example of a comparative study is the doctoral thesis of Professor Ali Erbaş, entitled *İlahi Dinlerde Melek* (“The Angel in Divine Religions”). In addition to this work, which was published in 1999 under the title *İlahi Dinlerde Melek İnanıcı* (“Angel Belief in Divine Religions”), Erbaş has also published another work, entitled *Hristiyan Ayinleri: Sakramentler* (“The Christian Ceremonies: The Sacraments”) (İstanbul 1998).⁴¹ Thus, Erbaş has made a significant contribution to the research on Christianity that has been undertaken in Turkey.

Yet another scholar in this field is Professor Ali Rafet Özkan, who has made a considerable contribution with his doctoral thesis *Yedinci Gün Adventizmi* (“Seventh-day Adventism”) and his book *Türkiye Çingeneleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma* (“A Survey of the Gypsies of Turkey”).⁴² The former was published as *Fundamentalist Hristiyanlık-Yedinci Gün Adventizmi* (“Fundamentalist Christianity — The Seventh-day Adventists”).⁴³ Özkan has also written various articles on Wilhelm Schmidt, Traditional Turkish Religion, Theosophy, and the New Age Movement, some of which have been published in international journals.

Professor Ahmet Gökbel is a scholar whose research has focused on Turkish folk beliefs and folkloric studies. His doctoral thesis was on the

⁴⁰ See Ahmet Güç, *Dinlerde Mabet ve İbadet*, Bursa 1999.

⁴¹ See Ali Erbaş, *Hristiyan Ayinleri — Sakramentler*, İstanbul 1998.

⁴² Ali Rafet Özkan, *Türkiye Çingeneleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma*, Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara 2000.

⁴³ Ali Rafet Özkan, *Fundamentalist Hristiyanlık Yedinci Gün Adventizmi*, Ankara 1998.

Varsak Turkoman in Anatolia and he has also written various articles and papers on his research in the field of folklore and Turkish superstitions. *Kıpçak Türkleri* (“Kypchak Turks”)⁴⁴ is perhaps his most significant contribution to the history of religions, and he is one of the foremost scholars to follow Tanyu and Güngör.

The generation of historians of religion represented above have had the opportunity to draw directly upon Tanyu’s scholarly experience. Yet another generation of scholars is now attempting to further research in the field of the history of religions, taking the same care with regard to method, attitude and sources. Like their forerunners, they are also making valuable contributions, both with their scholarly works and the theses they supervise.

A general overview of current research in the field of the history of religions in Turkey can best be achieved by classifying the studies according to topic, although it is possible to put some studies in more than one category. On the basis of an established system of classification,⁴⁵ the studies may be arranged as follows:

1. Regional folkloric studies (*Yahyalı Çevresindeki Varsakların Dini Folkloründe Gelenek ve Değişmeler* [“Tradition and Changes in Varsaq’s Religious Folklore around Yahyalı”], *İzmir ve Çevresindeki Adak Yerleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma* [“A Study on Votive Places in and around Izmir”]).
2. Historiographic studies of Muslim scholars who wrote about religion, such as Ibn Hazm, Maqdisî, Abû al-Ma‘âlî, Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî etc.
3. Studies examining a phenomenon associated with a specific religion: the Sabbath in Judaism, the Day of Judgment in Christianity etc.
4. Studies comparing a phenomenon in different religions: Adam in Judaism, Christianity and İslam; prayer in divine religions; the Problem of evil in Divine Religions; the pilgrimage in religions; the understanding of purity in religions; repentance in Divine Religions; grace in divine religions; the angel in divine religions; symbols in

⁴⁴ See Ahmet Gökbel, *Kıpçak Türkleri*, Ötüken Yayınları, Ankara 1998.

⁴⁵ See Baki Adam, “Prof. Dr. Hikmet Tanyu’dan Günümüze Dinler Tarihi Çalışmaları,” *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 36 (1997) 509–519.

divine religions, the understanding of prophecy in the Holy Scriptures of divine religions; apostasy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

5. Studies of only one phenomenon in a religion: belief in the Day of Judgment in Judaism according to Jewish sources.
6. Studies of regional religions: ancient Anatolian religions; other religions in the region of Hidjaz at the time of the revelation of Islam was.
7. Studies specializing in one religion: the Mandeans, Sikhism, Judaism, Tibetan Buddhism.
8. Studies of religious sects: the emergence of Unitarianism and the factors that led to this; the emergence and development of the Syrian Church of Antioch; the Syrian Church in the 1–4th centuries; the Chaldean Church; The Fener Patriarchate and Turkey; the Greek Orthodox Church today.
9. Studies concerning ancient peoples mentioned in the Qur'an: the Âd and Thamūd Peoples.
10. Studies related to religion in the Turkish world: a socio-cultural study of the religion of Turks living in Caucasus; the religious history of Azerbaijan; Kirgiz folk beliefs; a study of Chuvash religion.
11. Studies of refutations: Ali b. Rabban al-Tabarî and his work *al-Radd 'alâ al-Nasârâ*.
12. Studies concerning Turkish minorities: the Istanbul Jews; the social and religious situation of the Christian Minorities in the period of Muhammad II the Conqueror; the social and religious situation of non-Muslims settled in Konya in the 17th century.
13. Studies of Christian General Councils: the Constantinople Council, The Second Vatican Council.
14. Studies of Holy Scriptures: the Indian Vedas, the Torah and its place in Judaism according to Jewish sources.
15. Studies based on archival documents: The Jews according to Ottoman archival documents; non-Muslim schools in Istanbul from the Tanzimat to the Republic.
16. Studies related to the religions mentioned in the Qur'an: non-Islamic religions in respect to the Qur'an; religions mentioned in the Qur'an.

17. Studies concerning other religions from the view of Islamic culture: the issue of the fate of Christ according to Islamic sources; Jesus in the Six Books; Jews and Judaism according to the Hadith.
18. Studies related to inter-religious relations: the Prophet Muhammad's relations to the People of the Book; the relations between Muslims and non-Muslims Settled in Konya in the second half of the 17th century; the Second Vatican Council and dialogue among religions; Christian-Muslim dialogue in contemporary Christian thought; Christian-Muslim dialogue according to the Qur'an and the Bible.
19. Studies of religious groups and religious movements in the Christian world: (Seventh-day Adventism, Moonism, Baptism, Methodism, Presbyterians, Jesuits, Lutheranism, Evangelism etc.

In addition to studies produced by Turkish scholars, the major works of famous Western scholars in the history of religions have been translated into Turkish, making an important contribution to this field. In spite of the fact that most of these translations were the work of individuals who were not specialists in the field and had no contact with specialists, their contributions cannot be denied. Among the most significant works translated into Turkish are *The Golden Bough* by James Frazer; *Magic, Science and Religion* by Malinowski; *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* by Durkheim; *Traité d'histoire des religions*, *The Quest, Images and Symbols*, *Le sacré et le profane*, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour* by Mircea Eliade; and some of Joseph Campbell's studies of mythology. Whether translated by specialists or not, these texts became significant for Turkish historians of religions.

With respect to studies in the history of religions in Turkey, the importance of The Turkish Association for the History of Religions cannot be overlooked. This association has facilitated communication between scholars, and has held scholarly conferences and symposiums since its establishment, which have been put to the service of scholarship through publications.

The Establishment of the Turkish Association for the History of Religions (TAHR) and Its Scholarly Activities

The Turkish Association for the History of Religions (TAHR) was established in 1994. According to the organisation's statutes, the aims were threefold: to improve and promote the understanding for the culture and thinking of the history of religions; to promote work and publications in a spirit of academic seriousness and responsibility; and to provide a forum that would encourage unity and communication among Turkish historians of religions. The association has 90 members from 22 universities in Turkey. Professor Küçük, of the Faculty of Divinity at Ankara University, who laid the foundation for the association, was elected president at the first general assembly. Aided by other scholars in the field, Küçük has remained president since 1994.

TAHR is managed by a Board of Directors which consists of five office-holders: president, deputy, secretary, accountant and treasurer. The association publishes a bulletin called *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları* ("Research in the History of Religions"), in which the papers presented at various symposiums held by the association since its establishment have been published. Even before the establishment of the association, a meeting was held in Samsun on 24–25 September, 1992, under the leadership of Professor Sarıkçıoğlu; it gathered about two-thirds of the historians of religions in Turkey for scholarly discussions on a vast scale. Papers from the symposium were published under the title "The First Symposium of Research in the History of Religions in Turkey."⁴⁶ The first official meeting of the Association for the History of Religions was held in 1994 in Ankara.

The first activity of the Association for the History of Religions was a memorial meeting in honour of Professor Hikmet Tanyu; it was held on the 3rd anniversary of his death, 16 July, 1995. This was organized in conjunction with a symposium entitled "Discussion of Values For Turkey" that was held 17–18 July, 1995. The next year, a memorial meeting was organized for Professor Günay Tümer on the first anniversary of his death, 7 November, 1996; this was held in association with "The Second Symposium of Research in the History of Religions in Turkey," in Ankara

⁴⁶ See *Türkiye İ. Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları Sempozyumu*, Samsun 1993.

on 8–9 November 1996. In the latter, papers were presented on a number of issues: Inter-religious Dialogue and Contemporary Religious Movements (I), Religious Understanding of Turks and the Turkish World (II), Studies in the History of Religions and Methodology (III). The presentations made in these memorial meetings and the associated symposiums were compiled and published by the Association under the title of “Researches in the History of Religions I” in 1998 as a special edition.⁴⁷

In order to encourage future studies in the field of the history of religions and to reintroduce neglected topics, TAHR held The Third Symposium of Research in the History of Religions on 20–21 November, 1998, in Konya, in cooperation with the Faculty of Divinity of Selcuk University; it was entitled “Religion and the Understanding of Religion with Respect to the History of Religions.” The symposium papers were published under the title of “Research in the History of Religions II” in 2000.⁴⁸ The presentations at this symposium enhanced the participants’ understanding of the concept of religion and of various religions, which is an important issue in Turkey and in the rest of the world as well.

With the arrival of the New Millennium, the Association for the History of Religions held an international symposium in Ankara, 9–10 July, 2001; it was entitled “Christianity in its 2000th year: Its Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.” Several factors heightened the relevance of this symposium: the rapid convergence of East and West; the increase in interaction between Europe and Turkey, particularly in relation to the issue of Turkey’s full membership in the EU; the effort being made to develop inter-cultural and inter-social relations with members of other religions; the increasing number of Turkish migrants living in Europe; and the increasing interest in “Faith Tourism,” particularly in recent years.

The international symposium on Christianity had eight separate sessions, including an evaluation at the end and the following seven topics: Contemporary Christian Community in Turkey (I); The Rise of Christianity and Its Institutionalization -1 (II); The Rise of Christianity and Its Institutionalization -2 (III); Understanding Differences in Christianity (IV),

⁴⁷ See *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları I (Sempozyum 8–9 Kasım 1996 Ankara)*, Dinler Tarihi Derneği Yayınları, Ankara 1996.

⁴⁸ See *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları II (Sempozyum 20–21 Kasım 1998 Konya)*, Dinler Tarihi Derneği Yayınları, Ankara 2000.

Christianity and Contemporary Religious Movements (V); Christianity, Inter-religious Relations and Missionary Activity (VI); Christianity and the Turks (VII).

Two prominent scholars from Germany and France participated in the symposium as keynote speakers. Professor Peter Antes of Germany, the president of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR), presented a paper entitled “The Beginning of the Christian Hierarchy and Its Development.” Professor Liliana Vana of France contributed with a paper entitled “Les judéo-chrétiens aux premiers siècles.” In addition, papers were also presented by the representatives of religious minorities in Turkey, historians of religions and a “faith tourism” specialist. The papers presented in the symposium have been published under the title “Researches in the History of Religions III — Christianity: Its Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.”⁴⁹ Moreover, the participation of the chair of International Association for the History of Religions in the symposium has prepared the way for new developments. Professor Antes stated that he was impressed by the symposium and suggested that the Turkish Association apply for membership in the International Association for the History of Religions. He also stated that he would do all he could to ensure its international recognition in the academia. The Board of Directors placed the issue on the agenda at the General Assembly and, after some discussion, took the necessary steps to apply for membership. In this process, the name of the Association was changed to “The Turkish Association for the History of Religions.” Officials of the Association then formally applied to IAHR for membership on 22 May 2004. At the IAHR congress in Tokyo in 2005, TAHR was officially accepted as a member of the IAHR.

TAHR had previously submitted for the membership in the European Association for the Study of Religions (EASR), and its membership was officially approved at the EASR conference in Santander in 2004. As a result, TAHR continues its activities as an official member of both EASR and IAHR.

In the meantime, the scholarly activities of the Turkish Association for the History of Religions continued to grow with a symposium entitled

⁴⁹ See *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları III — Hristiyanlık: Dünü, Bugünü ve Geleceği*, Dinler Tarihi Derneği Yayınları, Ankara 2002.

“The Main Approaches to Muslims’ Relations with the Members of Other Religions,” held in Ankara 1–2 November, 2003. The symposium was organized in four main sessions: Islam and Other Religions in General (I), Muslim-Jewish Relations (II), Muslim-Christian Relations (III), Recent Problems and Islam (IV). The papers presented at the symposium were published under the title “Research in the History of Religions IV — Muslims and Members of Other Religions” in September, 2004.⁵⁰

The latest scholarly activity of the Turkish Association for the History of Religions was to organize a symposium in Ankara entitled “The Missionary Activities in Turkey from the Viewpoint of Turkish Historians of Religions,” 1–2 October, 2005. The symposium was organized in six sessions: the first session was on the issue of missionary activities and their historical development in general; sessions 2–5 were on missionary activities in the various regions of Turkey; session 6 took up some legal, religious, cultural and social precautions against missionary activities in Turkey; and to conclude, there was a general evaluation. The Association published the papers of the symposium under the title “The Missionary Activities in Turkey from Viewpoint of Turkish Historians of Religions” in January, 2006.

The Turkish Association for the History of Religions continues to carry out scholarly activities, such as organizing symposiums and publishing reviews in Turkey. The association is currently cooperating with IAHR to organize an international conference in Ankara (2007) on the subject of “Secularism and Religious Revival.”

Conclusion

Despite some struggles in the early years, studies in the history of religions in Turkey (1912–2004) have developed considerably with regard to method, content and academic conception. Studies undertaken by historians of religions in Turkey are conducted with a view to the fundamental requirements of the country and of society, particularly of the research subject. Thus, their aim is to contribute to the cultural heritage of the

⁵⁰ See *Dinler Tarihi Araştırmaları IV — Müslümanlar ve Diğer Din Mensupları*, Türkiye Dinler Tarihi Derneği Yayınları, Ankara 2004.

country. At the same time, however, they do not distance themselves from developments taking place in the world, particularly those occurring in the field of the history of religions in the West, in relation to method, subject, language and academic conception. Why have studies in the history of religions in Turkey not taken their deserved position among those in the West? In our opinion, one of the most important factors is the fact that these studies have not been published in Western languages and have therefore been inaccessible in the West. Happily, there are encouraging signs that Turkish academic studies in the field of the history of religions are gaining recognition in the international circles of scholarship. We believe that The Turkish Association for the History of Religions will play an important role in furthering this development. TAHR's aims are not only to provide a forum for communication among the historians of religions in Turkey, but also to increase contacts with historians of religions in particular and with circles of scholarship in general, in order to undertake joint projects. In this matter, the Association has already taken significant steps, as indicated by the association's acceptance as a member of The International Association for the History of Religions — thanks to the zeal of the president, Professor Küçük, and the encouragement of Professor Peter Antes.

Book Reviews

The Locality of Religion in Ancient Cities (a collective review)

Religiöse Autonomie der Stadt im Imperium Romanum. Öffentliche Religionen im Kontext römischer Rechts- und Verwaltungspraxis. By CHRISTA FRATEANTONIO. (Studies and Texts in Antiquity und Christianity 19) — Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck 2003. Pp. XI, 260.

Bürgerrecht und Kultteilnahme. Politische und kultische Rechte und Pflichten in griechischen Poleis, Rom und antikem Judentum. By STEFAN KRAUTER. (ZNW-Beiheft 127) — Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2004. 23 x 15,5 cm. XIII, Pp. 505.

Heiligtümer in Ostia. By ANNA-KATHARINA RIEGER. (Studien zur antiken Stadt 8) — Münsche, Pfeil 2004. Pp. 320, 212 ill.

The study of Roman religion has entered a new phase which uses concepts of plurality, the interaction between centre and periphery, urbanization and the social and historical context of the Empire (See A.-K. Rieger 13–19 for a good introduction to this trend). While the concept of (Greek) *polis*-religion can no longer be applied to religion in the Roman Empire, local differences show that conceptualising Roman religion in terms of imperial uniformity is also inaccurate. That is, religion in the Roman Empire was not developed as a means of political or administrative unification. The three recent monographs reviewed in the following present each a different approach to the question of the locality of religion in the Roman Empire.

C. Frateantonio argues on the basis of laws and administrative texts issued in the Roman Empire that individual cities enjoyed a considerable degree of religious autonomy. In analogy to the autonomy of the city's administration, the *sacra publica* were also governed by the city's authorities. This thesis is tested in the context of the different types of cities (Italian cities, cities conquered in a *deditio*, *coloniae*, *municipia*). The results are rather hypothetical, suggesting that religion did not function as a means of exercising imperial power at all. One goal

of the inquiry is to explain the change of systems from the pagan to the Christian one. When Christians began to appear in public office (mid 3rd century AD), a systemic conflict arose: local religious authority (Christian bishops) came into conflict with the central political authority (emperor). The book predominantly addresses normative concepts; the conflicts within the cities and their effects on other cities and the centre are not touched upon. Local historical studies require a more complex design if they are to achieve adequately validated conclusions.

A very different approach is taken in the book on Ostia's local religion: it focusses on a single town (Ostia), three sanctuaries (*quattro tempietti*: as a passage between city and harbour, the vast triangle field of Magna Mater; emperor's cult in the Tempio rotondo); and local archaeological evidence. The study still produces significant results for Roman religion, however, because comparative evidence is presented. The questions A.-K. Rieger is dealing with are: (1) How did the sacral topography change since the time of the Republic, during the empire and in Late Antiquity? How much does the development depend on changes in the city of Rome (in contrast to C. Frateantonio's theoretical treatment of Rome)? (2) When Ostia changed from a military harbour to an economic harbour, was there a change in the cults as well? Significant new insights are also presented beyond the question of the integration of oriental religions: e.g. the alleged ritual of *Tauromachia* in the cult of Magna Mater is not corroborated in Ostia (165–168). The citizens identify themselves (instead of as a *gens*/family) with their *collegia* (clubs), though they do not separate into different groups, but stress their loyalty to the *patroni* and to the emperor's house. The cult of Magna Mater changes from being seen as an exotic and strange cult to a cult of loyalty with the Julian-Claudian emperors already in the early empire whereas in Late Antiquity it becomes a place of opposition of the senatorial *élite* against the (Christian) emperors. Catalogues and indices allow us to verify the conclusions. The sacral topography is a mirror of that of the city of Rome. Other new cults (Castor und Pollux, Vulcanus, Hercules/Bona Dea) in the colony of Ostia show the social change of the inhabitants of the city. In the same graduate school another monograph on Italian harbour cities by Dirk Steuernagel presents further material on this kind of market of religions.

One aspect of religious plurality and mobility concerns the relative exclusion or inclusion of foreigners. The results of S. Krauter's monograph are rather surprising. Since Fustel de Coulanges' *La cité antique* (1864) a direct relation between citizenship and membership in the religion of the city has been assumed. Consequently foreigners were believed to be unable to partake in the city-cults, unless included in the family of their host. Moreover, some scholars thought that there was even a duty to sacrifice, a compulsory cult-activity. Civic and religious rights are confined to the citizens of a *polis/civitas*: "Access to religious rites

was coextensive with political rights” (Beard/North/Rice, *Religions of Rome*, 1998, I, 215), a contention corroborated with quotations from classical evidence. Contrary to the *communis opinio*, S. Krauter has gathered evidence, esp. epigraphical evidence, which shows that there is not an exact correlation between participation in cults and civic rights and ethnic identity. Strangers sometimes receive explicit permission to attend, to partake, and even to act in cultic activities. Similarly, one cannot identify a clear difference between paternal religion and strangers’ cults which were to be expelled from time to time. Especially in the case of ancient Judaism, a sharp distinction between God’s chosen people and strangers (*gojim*) is a stock argument. But the evidence for the exclusion of people of other ethnic origins from the cult in the second temple and in the synagogues is small compared with the bulk of explicit invitation to partake in a service. This leaves the question open as to why Christians were excluded from the synagogue and why they in turn came into conflict with pagan cults based on an exclusivist understanding of religious practice?

These monographs analyse Roman Religion in its plurality in historical times and abandon the picture of decadence of the agrarian cults of original Rome, contributing to a new and more accurate image of Roman Religion.

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War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth: Theories of the Apocalyptic. Edited by STEPHEN D. O'LEARY & GLEN S. MCGHEE. (Millennialism and Society, vol. 2). London & Oakville, Equinox 2005. Pp. xxvi, 290. ISBN 1–90476–881–1 (paperback). £15.99/\$26.95.

Apocalypticism and millennialism are hot issues at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In a global drama performed by the last remaining super-power as a 'war on terror' that will ultimately lead to a 'restructuring of the Middle East,' it is the responsibility of scholars of religion to analyze, contextualize, and historicize the underlying religious concepts and the social developments involved. The series "Millennialism and Society" is a very welcome contribution to this analysis. Emerging from annual meetings of the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University (1996–2002), as of 2006 the series consists of three volumes. While *Gender and Apocalyptic Desire* (2006) focuses on the significance of sex, sexuality, and gender in apocalyptic narratives, *The End that Does* (2006) looks at "Art, Science and Millennial Accomplishment." For 2008, Equinox announces the publication of a fourth volume, entitled *Apocalyptic Texts and Popular Culture*. Thus, although published as volume 2 of the series, *War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth* can be read as a systematic introduction to the field in general and to the series in particular. Many chapters in this volume are highly interesting. In this short review, however, I can address general questions only and refer to individual chapters that stand out as relevant or as problematic.

Following a helpful "Introduction and Overview" by the editors, the volume is organized in three parts, stretching from "Core Ideas of Millennial Theory" to "Approaches to Millennial History" and "Millennial Hopes, Apocalyptic Disappointment." Hence, the first part provides the reader with analytical frameworks and foundational approaches. Ted Daniels, in his opening chapter, critically discusses prominent theories of apocalypticism and millennialism and comes to the — not entirely innovative — conclusion that at the core of apocalyptic structures lies a dynamic of radical opposites, such as 'Good versus Evil' or 'us versus them.' There can be no doubt that this polemical rhetoric of identity formation is an important structural element of apocalyptic or millennial discourse; but the editors' opinion that "Daniels can effectively be said to deconstruct apocalypticism" (xvi), seems a bit exaggerated. In fact, Daniels' contribution reveals the shortcomings of many theoretical — and necessarily reductionist — approaches. While his observation "that millennialism is inherently political because it arises from the perception of political evil — the abuse of power — and seeks to remedy it" (5) hints at the crucial political dimension of millennialism, the historical proof Daniels offers for this argument is very weak. For instance, his description of the "wandering holy man named Sabbatai Zvi" (7),

i.e. the influential Jewish messianic movement of seventeenth-century Sabbatianism, is completely unaware of the complex academic debate about this figure, which leads the author to unwarranted assumptions such as the diagnosis that Zvi “seems to have suffered from what is now known as ‘bipolar disorder’” (7; see also his questionable interpretation of the book of Revelation on page 12).

A critical reader might gain the impression that the over-simplification of history is not only a characteristic of millennialist and apocalyptic group formation, but also of academic analysis. When Richard Landes notes in his theoretical contribution that “[m]illennialists have a passion for justice. They think they know good and evil well” (20), one wonders how such a generalization will add to a thorough-going analysis of millennialist discourse. With this critique I do not intend to devalue the theoretical contributions by Daniels or Landes — who in fact elaborates his model of interpretation later on in his chapter — but simply make the point that our analyses have to be grounded in historical research, if we want to avoid superficiality.

Part II presents highly interesting case studies, some of them breaking new ground for further research. For instance, David Cook provides new insight into the relevance of apocalypticism in early Islam, an element that adds to the explanation of the remarkable success and spread of Islam in its formative phase. David Redles’ analysis of millennialist perspectives that underlie Nazi identities and politics is an important contribution to the study of National Socialism and its influence on major intellectuals of the twentieth century, such as Martin Heidegger and Carl Gustav Jung (even if this influence has been noted before, so that “the intellectual history of modern Europe” will not necessarily, as the editors enthusiastically proclaim on page xviii, be “in need of a thorough rethinking and eventual rewriting”).

The papers collected in part III under the vague title “Millennial Hopes, Apocalyptic Disappointment” are extremely varied, both in content and methodology. While Glen S. McGhee’s excellent account of Leon Festinger’s dissonance theory and its intellectual setting after World War II would have fitted part II, and Leslie L. Downing’s application of René Thom’s cusp catastrophe theory in fact contributes to part I, the contributions by Daniel C. Noel and Charles B. Strozier, which conclude the volume, should have been filed under something like “personal reflection and manifestos,” if they are to be included in an academic volume at all. Particularly problematic is Strozier’s reflection on “Thoughts on Apocalyptic Violence and the New Terrorism,” in which he describes the emotions and reactions of people involved in the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Throughout the text, the author adopts the language of his research object to such a degree that his conclusions seem naïve and biased. For instance, Strozier rhetorically asks the reader: “So what does [Osama bin

Laden] want? He wants to destroy America and its culture, and out of such a victory make a purified Islam” (273). Adopting this one-sided description that completely neglects the apocalyptic *structure* of the global drama — which *includes* U.S. policy and mythmaking —, the author concludes that the state of chronic fear and paranoia in the States “is not altogether inappropriate. There are those in the world with a grim determination to destroy us, and increasingly these new terrorists have access to means of annihilation that can realize their most extravagant dreams” (273). Conclusions like these not only fly in the face of critical analysis presented in previous chapters (see, for instance, Damian Thompson’s remarks on the myths surrounding 9/11, p. 244), they also indicate the necessity of studying millennialism as a mass phenomenon in the United States.

In sum, *War in Heaven/Heaven on Earth* is a useful introduction to concepts and historical examples of millennialism and apocalypticism and will certainly find its way into the classroom. While some of its chapters break new ground for further research, others reveal the methodological problems that this field of research has to confront.

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Muslims in Prison. Challenge and Change in Britain and France. By JAMES A. BECKFORD, DANIELLE JOLY AND FARHAD KHOSROKHAVAR. Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan 2005. Pp. viii + 301. ISBN 1–4039–9831–0. US\$ 90.

This book is based on a research project that was started at first to discover how Muslim prisoners are treated in the prisons of France and England and Wales. The result is a well-written and wide-ranging book on race, ethnicity and religion and their interplay. Because the authors did not evade any of the complexities of the subject matter, *Muslims in Prison* is a very dense and informative book. The different social, political and national contexts and the experiences of various categories of prisoners, chaplains, imams and prison officers are skilfully connected. Although the book is packed with information, it never becomes sketchy or shallow. On the contrary, the book delivers valuable insights in the complex processes in which the category of Muslims is socially constructed and used in prisons.

By switching from the points of view of all parties involved in the French and in the English and Welsh configurations, the book demonstrates the differences between the British multi-faith approach and the practice of the French ideal of *laïcité*, which is a “legal, moral, and political principle of State neutrality in matters of religion which excludes them from the public sphere” (“Glossary”, 298). Ultimately, the book shows that the experience of being a Muslim prisoner differs considerably between France and England and Wales.

In England and Wales, the religious identity of prisoners is considered important and many measures have been taken to facilitate the exercise of Islam in the British prison system. In practice, individual prison officers, governors, chaplains and prisoners have an important impact on the outcome of these measures. For instance, mutual distrust, low level discrimination and the failure of Muslim organizations to provide better support for prisoners, chaplains and released prisoners have created a situation that is far from ideal. Even though the standards and expectations of prisoners have improved, feelings of relative deprivation still persist. Muslim prisoners do not see themselves as a tolerated minority anymore; they want equal treatment. On the other hand, some Christians are offended by the course of action; they do not want their chapel to be used as a prayer room for Muslims. One Christian chaplain confided, “I do not believe in multi-faith and I feel it is sacrilegious. Nobody listens to us... We have been encroached upon” (105).

In France, the situation is quite different. Here, it is illegal to ask prisoners to declare their religious faith and Muslims in French prisons simply do not have the opportunities to practice Islam. One of the more ironic effects of *laïcité* is

that because of the shortage of imams in French prisons, inmates turn to radical and extremist Muslim prisoners for Islamic education. The lack of imams also leads to increasing influence of extremist and radical ideas for the reason that some prisons furtively co-operate with radical and extremist prisoners to maintain order among Muslim prisoners. Above all, the frustration of Muslim prisoners is enhanced by the ambiguous ways *laïcité* is interpreted. The authors conclude: “Each prison seems to interpret *laïcité* to suit itself and to reflect its own history and social setting” (85). For example, while nuns may cover their head because it is an accepted ‘tradition’, female Muslim inmates are not allowed to wear a headscarf in the public sphere; it is regarded as a ‘religious’ practice.

To gain access to prisons was not easy but the efforts of the researchers were worth it, for in prisons the contours of the French and British differences in the policies and practices concerning Muslims are sharply manifested. Consequently, prisons afford an exceptionally clear view of state policies regarding the social and cultural diversity, and the responses of different groups of people to these policies and practices. This clear view on complex processes makes the book interesting for politicians who are engaged with these policies as well as for prison officials. Evidently, it is interesting for students and scholars who study religion.

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Comparer les comparatismes. Perspectives sur l'histoire et les sciences des religions. Edited by MAYA BURGER AND CLAUDE CALAME. Paris, Edidit/Milano, Archè 2006. Pp. 240. ISBN 2–912770–06–08. € 17.

Pendant longtemps on ne regarda les autres religions que pour mieux montrer la supériorité de la sienne. Puis des philosophes commencèrent à poser un regard également réprobateur sur toutes les religions. Un traité de paix fut ensuite proposé aux théologiens et aux anti-cléricaux: il fut question d'écrire l'histoire d'une religion à la fois, et de faire une histoire appuyée sur les données factuelles établies par la philologie critique et l'archéologie. Il est maintenant apparent que toutes ces approches mettaient en oeuvre des épistémès qui restent bien en deçà des exigences épistémologiques qui ont cours aujourd'hui dans les sciences humaines. En particulier parce qu'elles n'encourageaient aucune réflexivité sur l'entreprise de celui ou de celle qui veut savoir.

La collection d'articles ici rassemblés (à la suite d'un Congrès de la Société Suisse de Sciences des Religions) évoque en première page les perspectives ouvertes par Benjamin Constant. Il convient d'être au clair quant à son propre bagage culturel avant de disserter sur celui des autres. Il convient aussi de ne pas rester enfermé dans les limites des baronnies disciplinaires qui organisent les universités. Les recherches monographiques ont accompli beaucoup, mais l'ère de la méfiance des historiens à l'égard de toute tentative de généralisation théorique touche à sa fin. La méthode comparative s'impose, mais à condition d'être pleinement réflexive: que comparer, comment et pourquoi? Les différents articles déploient cette approche dans les contextes de diverses aires culturelles.

L'école italienne a souligné l'importance de la révolution monothéiste et noté que notre culture est la seule qui s'est conçue en termes de religion et de civilisation. Placer la religion entre la nature et la culture c'est mettre en oeuvre une révolution théologique et anthropologique. Mais faire de la religion un principe nécessaire du sens en général installe à nouveau le chercheur dans l'ethnocentrisme. Il y a différentes hiérarchies de sens et, parmi nos acquis conceptuels, la notion de civilisation semble plus généralisable que celle de religion (Nicola Gasbarro).

L'impact des concepts explicatifs issus du monde chrétien est mis à l'épreuve par la comparaison entre brahmanes et rabbins et leurs deux systèmes sacrificiels. Il s'agit de délimiter à frais nouveaux les sujets à comparer et de trouver le troisième terme permettant d'interpréter similarités et différences. C'est l'étude des gestes d'hospitalité qui permet une telle avancée (Philippe Bornet).

Nos collègues d'expression anglaise n'ont pas toujours été aussi prudents qu'il le fallait dans leurs comparaisons. Le nouveau recours aux sciences cognitives souligne que les catégories sont rarement propres et nettes et que les humains ne

vivent jamais entièrement en conformité avec leurs systèmes symboliques. Sur ces bases, l'auteur élabore une typologie de la prière (Armin Geertz).

La rencontre entre christianisme et néoplatonisme (un sujet déjà fort travaillé) permet d'aborder la question de la sotériologie en marquant avec soin les différences autant que les ressemblances, et de nuancer les affirmations généreusement avancées par plusieurs généralistes (Yvan Bubloz).

Le terme de comparaison différentielle est introduit pour traiter du mythe de Médée. Le propos est clair: il faut reconnaître les différences, construire un cadre de comparaison, configurer des plans de comparaison et placer les objets dans un rapport non-hiérarchique. Trois traitements antiques du mythe de Médée montrent l'ineptie des efforts de comparaisons universalisantes. Il n'y a donc pas d'archétype de la femme en fureur (Ute Heimann).

Entre l'Inde et l'Europe l'heure n'est plus à l'examen des influences. Les échanges sont constants depuis un bout de temps et les regards se croisent en un jeu permanent. L'implantation du yoga en Suisse permet de documenter de manière magistrale la complexité de l'interaction profonde (Maya Burger).

La notion wébérienne de charisme devient un outil précieux en la resituant dans un contexte généalogique. Dans le cas de Jésus comme dans celui de Mahomet une personnalité mobile, capable d'improviser, dont le pouvoir de communication repose sur la transformation de matériaux donnés, met ainsi en branle un processus qui aboutit à un nouveau système de croyance (Enzo Pace).

Le dernier article a les traits d'une synthèse. Le "triangle comparatif" comporte le chercheur et les deux côtés de la comparaison qu'il met en place. Son regard s'éloigne des deux, mais il doit aussi s'éloigner de lui-même. Chacun des deux côtés a pour sa part des opérateurs de comparaison qui diffèrent de ceux que le chercheur met en place au départ. Mais les oppositions binaires ne sauraient être essentialisées, car chacune des trois pointes du triangle met en marche une dialectique. Ce modèle ouvre de riches perspectives, et donne à penser que nous ne sommes pas près d'avoir une théorie de la religion bien définitive. Nous devons plutôt continuer à travailler sur l'histoire et les sciences des religions dans leurs diversités. Et faire une place aux formes extra-discursives de la connaissance (Claude Calame).

Chacun admet que le champ de "la religion" doit rester indéfini. Pourquoi le bouddhisme mais pas le fascisme? Combien faut-il d'adhérents à un mouvement quelconque pour qu'il devienne une nouvelle religion? La connaissance peut néanmoins avancer en faisant un détour réfléchi, méthodique et savant, par les religions. Les articles de cette remarquable collection ne sont ici qu'esquissés à grands traits, sans montrer la précision des analyses, les pistes de recherche (sur ce qu'on appelait le syncrétisme par exemple et qu'on décrit maintenant comme phénomènes d'hybridation), ni la valeur des bibliographies afférentes. Croyez-

moi: le volume atteste qu'un grand tournant a été pris dans l'histoire de la discipline. On a rompu avec un imaginaire du savoir trop étriqué mais encouragé par certaines formes de la pensée dite moderne et il ne suffit plus d'avoir un jargon de spécialiste pour contribuer à la connaissance de l'homme et de ses cultures.

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Theory and Practice of Yoga: Essays in Honour of Gerald James Larson. Edited by KNUT A. JACOBSEN. Leiden, Brill 2005. Pp. [x], 478. (Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions; vol. 110). ISSN 0169–8834, ISBN 90 04 14757 8. € 159, US\$ 207.

Gerald J. Larson is perhaps better known as Sāṃkhya specialist: in the list of his publications which is part of this volume, there are twelve titles (not counting reviews) that mention Sāṃkhya, four with Sāṃkhya and Yoga together, only three with Yoga without Sāṃkhya. Thus, the title of this *Festschrift* opens up horizons which must have been programmatically included in his own horizons. At least, the many grateful acknowledgements of Larson as a teacher by those among the contributors who were his students and who have taken up Yoga as a subject of their own research suggest as much. These contributions are testimonies to the impulses received from Larson and they document how the model set by this teacher has been realized in various ways through solid and creative research within a shared horizon. This is indeed a fortuitous way to honour and to felicitate such a teacher!

The volume contains 19 contributions (all in English). Summaries and an index serve as aids for orientation; the bibliographical references conclude each article separately. As the editor's introduction (1–27) places the contributions within the "Yoga Traditions", it seems useful to list the section titles (with subtitles added in parentheses) in order to outline the scope of the collection and its implicit priorities. The authors associated with the subject matter of a section are given in square brackets. These names include former colleagues but above all they amount to a probably fairly representative cross-section of what might be called the "Larson school".

Theory and practice of Yoga (meaning of the term)

Yoga before the Yogasūtra (origins, Yoga in the Upaniṣads, Yoga in the Mahābhārata, Yoga and Buddhism, Classical Yoga and Classical Sāṃkhya [T. S. Rukmani], Theism and monism [Lloyd Pflueger — with the unfortunate "variant" Pflueger in table of contents and introduction])

The manifold forms of Yoga (Haṭha-yoga [Craig Davis], Tantric traditions [Sthaneshwar Timalsina; Paul Muller-Ortega; Jeffrey Lidke], Yoga and Vedānta [Richa Pauranik Clements; Nandini Iyer; P. Pratap Kumar; Ramdas Lamb], Yoga and Bhakti [Tracey Pintchman], the Guru/Yogin [Antonio Rigopoulos; Knut A. Jacobsen; Pratapaditya Pal])

Yoga as global phenomenon [Patrick Mahaffey; Judy Saltzman; Wade Dazey]
To which must be added Kenneth G. Zysk (on Physiognomy) and James McNamara (with a personal reflection on Gerald J. Larson as teacher).

There is no way of doing justice to the individual articles, to their differences in scope, topic, methodology and diction, short of writing individual reviews. Inevitably, I like some of them better than others, and each reader (may there be many!) of the volume as a whole will have different preferences depending on his or her expectations and criteria. There is no evidence that the authors knew each other's contributions before the publication of the collection. It is hoped that as a collection it will contribute to creating the links, checks and balances, and learning processes which will further advance and stimulate yoga research.

The introduction by Knut A. Jacobsen provides a general survey and does not aim at being innovative, but rather at being useful by mapping the yoga research represented in what follows (though the order in the introduction is different from the order in the book). It might have been stimulating had the editor not only summarized the "Yoga Traditions" but had he worked out in sharper profile where the problems of terminology, chronology, or of the intertextuality of these traditions lie and how they should or could determine academic research on yoga and the many yogas. The title of the book, for example, isolates 'Yoga' from *Sāṃkhya*, but not all the contributors see it like that (using the hyphenated 'Sāṃkhya-Yoga' in a comprehensive and vague sense). Given the general parlance of *Sāṃkhya* as the (philosophical) foundation of Yoga, the distinction and distinctiveness of *Sāṃkhya* and Yoga is one of the problems one would have liked to see treated more explicitly.

Yoga is several times 'defined'. The volume makes amply clear that there is no single such thing called yoga (but many) and that there must be many methods and approaches to this multiple thing. The word is used with confidence and provides a reference point without much reflection on how the word is used and what qualifies it as a concept that applies even where the word does not occur (e.g. in Plato). With such questions in mind the volume turns into a primary source for a study on "yoga" in Western academic discourse.

Peter Schreiner
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Revista Lusófona de Ciência das Religiões, 7/8 (2005), IV

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Candanbala's Tears: Recovering the Emotional Life of Jainism

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Abstract

In the oft-told narrative of the Jain sati Candanbala, we see her standing at the door in chains, making an offering of lentils to Mahavir with tears in her eyes. Candanbala's tears, which arise after Mahavir passes by without taking alms, resonate with the Jain experience of worshipping an unresponsive Jina. Jain theology has been presented as anti-emotion and yet, within the most normative strata of the tradition, we find emotions and bhakti devotionism as key first causes of moral actions of ideal persons. This essay examines the representations of Candanbala's tears in Shvetambar narrative and hymn literature alongside contemporary performances of the Candanbala Fast, the end of which is marked by a reenactment of this narrative. Analysis (informed by field research) of textual materials illuminates the potential for beneficial emotions within the Jain tradition alongside the argument that Candanbala's popularity arises from an identification with her moment of despair.

Keywords

devotionalism, emotion, Jainism, tears

“Come, come, my god, to my empty door, to my lonely courtyard
Crying Candanbala begs you today to come to my lonely courtyard.”
Chained feet and a shaved head, eyes filled with tears,
Fasting for three days, her mouth filled only with the Navkar.¹
A meal of boiled lentils in their mouths but without any attachment to life,
Some monks can beg for food to eat and still not care about eating.
That delightful monk makes an entrance into Koshambi city.

¹ The *Navkar* is the foundational mantra of Jain practice.

For five months and twenty-five days, he wandered begging for food.
 Begging properly from door to door, wandering back and forth,
 He thinks: “Who is this smiling great ascetic who has a similar resolve?”
 Candanbala holds out the food and that monk turns away from there.
 “O Lord, what did I do wrong?” and tears rained down.
 Knowing his vow was now fulfilled, that lord,
 Seeing Candanbala’s emotion, took the offering of lentils.
 Then instantly a miracle occurred, the chains on her feet broke,
 Her beautiful hair returned and there was a year of continuous happy joy.
 “Come, come Vir Svami, come Mahavir,” she sang,
 “Look at my tears and accept my offering of lentils.”

The delightful monk whom Candanbala implores to come to her courtyard is Mahavir, the most recent of Jainism’s enlightened teachers or Jinas. Candanbala had been cruelly mistreated — chained, imprisoned, starved — by her adoptive mother; these privations happen to coincide with a set of qualities fore-ordained by a vow Mahavir has taken: he will not eat until a fasting, chained, shaved, enslaved, and weeping princess offers him lentils from a winnowing fan. This hymn — and many narratives — celebrate the moment at which she satisfies his vow with her tears.²

Jain philosophical tracts repeatedly celebrate passionlessness as a central virtue of a pious Jain and a requirement for enlightenment. In Jain discourse, enlightenment arises out of and is marked by the cessation of passions.³ In addition, emotions are seen as part of the world of suffering and rebirth.⁴ Enlightened beings are perfectly passionless. Conversely, passionate emotion is the cause of karmic peril, according to normative Jain teachings on karma. It is not surprising, then, that scholarship has accepted — if not reified — Jainism’s anti-emotion stance by focusing on its veneration of passionlessness. What, then, do we make of the verses above in which Candanbala begs with her impassioned tears Mahavir to accept her alms? This hymn, “*Avo Avo Dev Amara*,” was

² The narrative moment it celebrates also resembles the moment — without tears — in which any mendicant arrives to take alms.

³ *Tattvartha Sutra* 10.1. The *Tattvartha Sutra* is accepted by both Shvetambar and Digambar Jains (with only very minor variations mostly in the commentaries) as authoritative on matters of Jain karma theory (Dundas 2002:86–87).

⁴ *Tattvartha Sutra* 8.25–26 (Tatia 1994:203–6).

taught to me by the Shvetambar Tapa Gacch monk, Devguptavijay, though subsequently I learned that many of the Jain laywomen I worked with in Pune knew the song.

Candanbala is a Jain sati — that is, a perfectly virtuous woman — who attains enlightenment in this lifetime.⁵ She is, in fact, one of the most venerated satis with her own devotional narratives, hymns, paintings and rituals. What do we make of the fact that the climactic moment in the story depends on an expression of passionate emotion (tears), and that the story's resolution hinges on Mahavir's responding to that emotion? In the context of Jainism's ideal of passionlessness, are her tears transgressive? Scholarship has often dealt with this seeming contradiction by classifying such behavior and narratives as popular, non-orthodox Jainism.⁶ If this is the case, how is it that the recitations of her narrative and fasting rituals associated with them are widely encouraged by and popularized by Jain mendicants?⁷ Nussbaum suggests that one finds in literature the most appropriate site for the exploration of moral thinking.⁸ She writes: "to grasp the full story of the emotional life of an individual or group will require examining the stories it tells itself and the connections among these."⁹ It may be more fruitful to examine tellings of the Candanbala story as exemplifying conflicting discourses about emotion in Jainism.

This essay will be focused on the devotional narratives and fasting rituals associated with the Jain sati Candanbala, though I will set this discussion in the context of scholarship on religion and emotion and, in particular, religious tears. My thinking here is informed primarily by my research in Jain lay traditions and bhakti including field research among Gujarati-speaking Shvetambar Jains in Maharashtra, and textual work with Shvetambar Murtipujak Jain materials. This essay has three major parts. The first will establish a context for Jain thinking on emotion, the

⁵ Kelting 2006 discusses the term *sati* and its use in Jain contexts.

⁶ Cort 2002:63 challenges this assumption. Also Cort 1990 is absolutely essential for contextualizing the Jain scholarship within the framework of religious studies and Orientalism.

⁷ More common Jain mendicant strategies use thwarted hope as a site for showing the futility of worldly life in order to move the protagonist towards renunciation.

⁸ Nussbaum 1990:290.

⁹ Nussbaum 1990:295.

second will focus on the Candanbala narrative in particular, and finally I will suggest an interpretation of the Candanbala story which centers around her tears as a locus of the ambivalent experience of Jain religious emotions.

One way of understanding this ambivalence is to read tears as emotional discourse. Candanbala's tears and the many repetitions of her narrative communicate to Jains through the invocation of her emotion. Emotions or, perhaps more properly, emotional discourses serve as communicative performances (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:11). Tears can stand in for the emotional state of the weeper without defining that state as sorrow, joy, or frustration. In a sense, tears can carry the multivalence of religious experience leaving room for individuals to make sense of their own tears (or the tears of others) in ways that resonate with their own histories and also with the emotional discourses of their religious traditions. When Jains identify with Candanbala, this identification seems to center around their empathy with her outpouring of tears of grief and frustration.

Such an act of identification must be set in the context of Jain devotionism (*bhakti*). In his essay on Jain *bhakti*, Cort convincingly proves that *bhakti* has been a central part of the Jain tradition since its early period and that representations of Jainism as non-devotional are misleading.¹⁰ He outlines the early history of Jain *bhakti* eloquently establishing that key practices (*vandana*, *caturvimshati-stava*) accepted as part of the daily obligations of mendicants point to presence of *bhakti* in the Jain tradition.¹¹ The practices associated with image worship, the veneration of teachers including the Jinas, and liturgical rites are, when conjoined with the evidences found in Jain theological texts, additional indicators of Jain *bhakti*. Once we include the textual history of devotional prayers and hymns like those embedded in temple worship, veneration of teachers and even the obligatory practice of confession and expiation of sins (*pratikraman*) which include devotional texts, we find a compelling case for the centrality of devotionism in the idealized models for both mendicant and lay Jains. Hymn singing and

¹⁰ Cort 2002:62.

¹¹ Cort 2002:69.

devotional practices are central for contemporary Jains and suggest continuities between these idealized models and the lived experiences of contemporary Jains.¹² What I propose to do here is to introduce the question of human emotion as part of the discourse of Jain bhakti. I center my discussion on emotions and their evidence (particularly tears) rather than on devotion per se but we will see how these circles of discourse overlap.

I intend for this essay to open up possibilities for study and discussion of emotion in the Jain normative tradition and of emotion as central to the experience of pious Jain practitioners, and to open up a dialogue between Jain studies and scholarship on religion and emotion. In Jain narrative traditions, emotions have proven redemptive as these emotions are directed at appropriate objects and goals and have — in some narratives — led directly to enlightenment. My argument begins with a discussion of when those emotions are considered beneficial to and befitting of pious and ideal Jains. The Candanbala narrative, in particular her tears, will then serve as a site for theorizing about Jain views on emotion.

The Problem of Emotions

For Jains, emotions can present a problem. Jain *moksa-marg* or liberation directed ideology idealizes a state of equanimity unmoved by desire as the basis for liberation.¹³ The rationale is that any desire leads to the attraction of karma to the soul and thus prevents liberation from the cycle of rebirth, making any kind of emotion karmically perilous because most emotions are understood as manifestations of desires.¹⁴ In an excellent analysis of the idea of compassion in Jain karma theory, Wiley provides a useful foundation for our discussion. She writes of the Digambar distinction made between right view with attachments (*saraga samyak*) and right view without attachments (*vitrag samyak*). Those who have the right view without attachments have reached a

¹² Kelting 2001.

¹³ My use of ideology here for Jain *moksa-marg* discourse derives from Cort's convincing argument for this term (Cort 2001:6–12).

¹⁴ *Tattvartha Sutra* 6.15 and importantly, commentary on this verse (Tatia 1994:158).

purity of soul such that they are no longer subject to the blocking karmas associated with attachment (*raga*) and aversion (*dvesha*) which include emotions generally.¹⁵ According to the 8th century Digambar monk Virasena's writings on Jain karma theory, there are several lists of deluding (*mohaniya*) karma that lead to the four passions — anger (*krodha*), pride (*mana*), deceitfulness (*maya*) and greed (*lobha*) — in varying degrees of intensity; or the nine emotions — laughter, affection, aversion, sorrow, fear, disgust, sexual cravings (male, female and hermaphrodite) — any of which prevent the soul from attaining omniscience and perfect conduct.¹⁶ Compassion is not proscribed by the list of four passions or nine emotions and therefore is an available emotion even for one who has reached a high state of perfection.¹⁷ With the exception of the Shvetambar Terapanthi Jains, all Jains understand compassion as easing the afflictions of others including alleviation of worldly suffering of others.¹⁸ What could be an ill-advised attachment to others — compassion — is clearly reframed in the Jain context as being an excellent first cause of moral behavior for ideal persons.

Beyond accepting compassion as an emotion that might be useful, Jain scholars suggest that compassion may be a key component of having correct views (*samyak darshana*)¹⁹ and can strengthen other vows. Alongside compassion for the afflicted, the other *bhavanas*²⁰ that

¹⁵ Wiley 2006:440.

¹⁶ Wiley 2006:443. Of course, though ridding oneself of deluding karma is part of the quest for liberation, even negative emotions properly channeled can be key motivators of right conduct. In his discussion of the *Civakacintamani*, written by the ninth century Digambar monk Tiruttakkatesvar, Ryan suggests convincingly that the author used the language of graphic sexuality to invoke the emotion of disgust — one that is specifically proscribed — which would then lead one to renunciation (Ryan 1998:81).

¹⁷ Wiley 2006:443.

¹⁸ The Shvetambar Terapanthi argue that no world-directed act is compassionate or virtuous and that the only compassion that binds merit is giving religious teaching (Vallely 2002:85). This view is similar to the state of the Jina after reaching omniscience when other forms of compassion must drop away because the karma that creates them can no longer bind (Wiley 2006:449).

¹⁹ Compassion is cited along with calmness (*prashama*), fear of worldly existence (*samvega*) and belief in souls and non-souls and other key cosmological details (*astika*) (Wiley 2006:440).

²⁰ *Bhavana* means “contemplation” or “meditation.” In Pujiyapada's commentary on the *Tattvartha Sutra* 7.6/SS 7.11 (translated alongside the root text in Tatia 1994),

strengthen vows are friendliness, delight in those whose qualities are superior, and equanimity towards the ill-behaved.²¹ According to the *Tattvartha Sutra*, compassion as part of the stage of right views (*samyaktva*) is, as Wiley writes: “an element in proper lay and mendicant conduct” and will “strengthen all five lay and mendicant vows.”²² That compassion is so elevated in so central a text as the *Tattvartha Sutra* reminds us that from the earliest and most canonical strata, certain emotions have been deemed, at the very least, not to be impediments and, in fact, to be helpful in upholding vows.²³

As a foundation for this essay, I want to briefly include two episodes characterized by emotion from within the Shvetambar canonical traditions: Marudevi’s joy and Mahavir’s compassion for his parents’ sorrow. Both of these episodes help illustrate that the injunctions against any desires is tempered even at the canonical strata. Normative literature is replete with examples of the karmic rewards which attach to those who experience joy in the perfection of other souls.²⁴ Candanbala, on the other hand, is rewarded karmically for her tears. She gains both worldly freedom and the spiritual merit of giving the alms which break a Jina’s fast. Many devotional texts connect her almsgiving directly to her gaining enlightenment and liberation. Her emotion, as represented by her tears, is necessary for her to gain her spiritual benefits.

Perhaps the most famous spiritual benefit arising from emotion in the Shvetambar tradition is the story of Marudevi’s joy at seeing her own son, Rsabha/Adinath in his enlightened state. Marudevi’s joy leads

these states which strengthen vows are termed *bhavanas*. An earlier verse in *Tattvartha Sutra* (6.23/SS 6.24) lists the *bhavanas* which bring about birth as a Jina. These should not be confused with the lists of *anupreksas* (sometimes called *bhavanas*) which are enjoined as objects of ongoing reflection intended to lead one towards renunciation (Williams 1963:244–46).

²¹ *Tattvartha Sutra* 7.6

²² Wiley 2006:442.

²³ In her study of Jain nuns and chastity, Fohr discovered that Jain nuns spoke of women’s ability to withstand more suffering contributing to their ability to be mendicants alongside the idea that their emotionality actually made them better able to uphold their vows, in particular the vows of celibacy (Fohr 2001:92).

²⁴ Santisuri developed a paradigm which is useful here. Karma is bound in three ways: one, by doing an act; two, by having someone else do an act; and three, by one’s appreciation of others doing an act (Kelting 2001:196).

to her immediate liberation as a *siddha* (a rank in Jain cosmology that is only lower than the *Arhat* and higher than all other souls) making her the first Jain in this time cycle to achieve liberation. In the *Avashyaka Nirvyukti*, the story of Marudevi's enlightenment goes as follows. Marudevi and her grandson Bharata are at the assembly hall (*samavasaran*) of Rsabha (the first Jina of this era). Marudevi comments on her son, Rsabha's renunciation of grandeur and Bharata tells her to look and see the wonders of his assembly hall. It continues: "She started to think with joy. . . . There itself, on the elephant's back, she reached Omniscience. she was Emancipated. The first human being to reach Emancipation in this descending era was Marudevi."²⁵ Marudevi immediately attains omniscience and liberation as the result of her joy. In my examination, I have found that the story was included in narratives of the life of Rsabha and in the liturgical and devotional hymns and narratives associated with the first Jina, and was regularly told to me when women (and men) wanted to illustrate that women can achieve enlightenment and liberation.

In my other example, Mahavir postpones his renunciation until after the death of his parents because he wants to avoid causing them despair suggesting that even attachment to his parents — at least in the form of compassion which leads him to postpone his progression to liberation — was acceptable for one who is to be a Jina in this very lifetime.²⁶ The *Kalpa Sutra*, a central Shvetambar canonical text, tells us that Trishala is happily pregnant and the whole kingdom is prospering since she conceived of the Jina. Mahavir then

out of compassion for his mother, did not move nor stir nor quiver, but remained quiet, stiff, and motionless. Then the following . . . idea occurred to the mind of the Kshatriyani Trishala: "The fruit of my womb has been taken from me, it has died, it is fallen, it is lost. Formerly it moved, now it does not move." Thus with anxious thoughts and ideas, plunged in a sea of sorrow and misery, reposing her head on her hand, overcome by painful reflections, and casting her eyes on the ground she meditated. . . . Then the Venerable Ascetic Mahavira, knowing that such an internal . . . idea had occurred to the mind of his mother, he quivered a little.²⁷

²⁵ Balbir 1990:66.

²⁶ *Kalpa Sutra* 4.92–94.

²⁷ *Kalpa Sutra* 4.92–93.

After he moves, his mother's joy returns and this leads Mahavir to take a vow: "It will not behove me, during the life of my parents, to tear out my hair, and leaving the house to enter the state of houselessness."²⁸ Thus Mahavir's renunciation is postponed for thirty years until after his parents' deaths.²⁹ Mahavir's impulse arises out of compassion for the sorrow caused to his mother (and everyone else) when it appears that he dies in the womb. In the *Kalpa Sutra* we find that the emotions of others are acceptable reasons for acting in certain religious ways. Mahavir is motivated to act by his compassion for his mother which foreshadows and prepares Jains for his compassionate response in the Candanbala story. This story teaches us that Mahavir is sensitive to the emotions of others and will react to their weeping and sorrow.

In these narratives, both those who experience the emotion and those who witness that expression benefit and are moved towards enlightenment and liberation. Though it is clear that Jain normative literature make claims to the moral results of emotion, we must not conflate the experience of Jinas after their enlightenment with expectations for not yet enlightened Jains — including those same Jinas before their own enlightenment. After enlightenment, Jinas are in a state of perfect equanimity which precludes any emotion except, perhaps, the compassion that leads them to teach.³⁰ However, these two stories of good emotion illustrate how the emotions both lead ideal persons towards moral acts which lead to enlightenment and, ultimately, liberation, and conversely, do not prevent the liberation of ideal persons.

In the first section of this article I have established at least in short-hand, I hope, a useful context for Candanbala's tears. One, tears are multivalent and can carry the burden of conflicting discourses within a religious tradition. Two, devotionalism and emotion have a long history as part of the orthodox and normative Jain textual traditions. Three, some emotions are key to the development of correct views, the performance of correct acts, and the movement towards liberation. Let us now proceed, with these stories about emotion in mind, to the more modest — though popular and oft-told — story of Candanbala.

²⁸ *Kalpa Sutra* 4.94.

²⁹ *Kalpa Sutra* 5.110.

³⁰ Wiley 2006:449.

The Story of Candanbala

Candana (the earlier name for Candanbala) appears as the head of the nuns under Mahavir in the *Kalpa Sutra* (5.135) but her narrative does not develop until the *avashyaka* (six daily obligations) commentaries of the seventh and eighth centuries. By the twelfth century, her story has crystallized into the version given by Hemacandra which I will summarize below. However, a key shift in the episode of Candanbala's tears, which I examine later, does not occur until sometime between the fifteenth and early eighteenth centuries when it appears in devotional genres. Candanbala is one of the many Jain *satis* whose lives are illustrative of the ideal path for women;³¹ she is also — as are a few other *satis* — emblematic of virtues enjoined for both men and women. These *sati* narratives are retold, alongside the stories of the great men (*mahapurusa*), in sermons, hymns and didactic literature for the edification of both mendicant and lay Jains. Candanbala's story is especially popular because of its role in a formative moment in the career of Mahavir and, I will argue, because the narrative provides an illustrative entry into the emotional life of Jainism.

The version of the Candanbala narrative that I give below is drawn from Hemacandra's *Trisasti-shalaka-purusa-caritra* where it is embedded in the stories of Mahavir's asceticism. Mahavir has already taken a private vow:

“If a princess, who has been reduced to slavery, her feet bound by iron chains, shaven, fasting, weeping from distress, one foot inside the threshold [sic], the other one outside, — all seeking alms being turned away from the house — shall offer me *kulmasa* in the corner of a winnowing basket then only shall I break my fast even after a long time, not otherwise.”³²

The king and queen of the Kaushambi try to determine the vow so that the people can feed the great monk, but do not succeed; nobody but Mahavir knows the terms of his vow and he has also taken a vow of silence. The people of Kaushambi are distressed because this monk will not accept alms from anyone. It is then that Candana's story is told. I give below a brief synopsis of the narrative:

³¹ Kelting 2006:6.

³² Johnson 1962:112.

A princess, Vasumati, is born in Campa. When Campa is sacked, a camel trader grabs the princess and her mother (who dies immediately). He sells Vasumati as a slave in Kaushambi. There, a Jain merchant (Dhana) sees Vasumati and realizes that she must be a kidnapped princess. He buys her and decides to raise her as his own daughter until her family finds her. Because of her beauty, they call her Candana.³³ As Candana grows more beautiful, the merchant's wife (Mula) becomes jealous of her. She has Candana's hair shaved off, and has her bound with chains and locked in a distant corner of the house. For three days, whenever the merchant asks after Candana, his wife lies to him that she is outside or asleep. When the merchant finally convinces the servants to tell him where Candana is, he goes quickly to her and finds her shaven, chained, with tears in her eyes, and having not had anything to eat or drink for three days. He searches for something for her to eat but there is only a winnowing basket full of lentils (*udad dal*). Candana vows that she will eat only after giving food first to a guest.

At this very moment, Mahavir, who has been fasting continuously for five months and twenty-five days while waiting to meet a suitable donor, comes seeking alms. Candana stands weeping in the doorway of her room with the winnowing basket full of lentils and calls to Mahavir that he should take alms. She fulfills all the criteria of his vow so he does. At the fulfillment of his vow, the gods shower gold, her chains break off her and her long hair miraculously returns. After Candana's true identity is revealed, the merchant, who had become like a father to her, is told to protect her until such time that Mahavir becomes enlightened and she can be his first female disciple, the head of the order of nuns under Mahavir, and ultimately reach enlightenment.³⁴

Here Candanbala's tears are present as a result of her suffering at the merchant's wife's hand and serve simply to mark her as a worthy donor to fulfill the vow Mahavir has taken. Sometime between the fifteenth century and the early eighteenth centuries, however, these tears migrate to a few moments later in the narrative. No longer a result of her

³³ Candana means 'she who is most excellent' deriving from its root meaning of 'she who is like sandalwood' (Monier-Williams 1997:386).

³⁴ My gloss here is drawn from Hemacandra's much longer telling found in Johnson 1962:114–19.

privations, they become a response to Mahavir's rejection of her alms. For the moment, though, her tears are present when he arrives, just one of many preconditions of his complex vow. Candana is little more than a fastener for a nearly impossible assemblage of accidents. The emphasis in this story is on Mahavir whose ability to fulfill an impossible vow is yet another one of his miraculous qualities.

Let us now see what happens when Candanbala's tears are shifted to the moment after Mahavir walks away without taking alms. A popular contemporary Jain sati narrative collection *Sol Mahasatio* (Sixteen Great Satis), renders the climactic moment rather differently from Hemacandra:

Candanbala was thinking [about her vow to only eat after feeding a mendicant] when Mahavir arrived like a bumblebee [going from flower to flower] to collect alms. Candanbala saw Mahavir coming and was filled with joy. Candanbala became happy and said: "Hey, obeisances to you, Lord of the three worlds, giver of heaven and liberation. . . . Hey Lord, give me joy and accept this pure food. Make me contented." Mahavir glanced over at Candanbala. Because Mahavir's vow required weeping and this condition remained unfulfilled, Mahavir had to turn back. Only the tears were missing from all the conditions of his vow but still the vow was not fulfilled. That Lord had to turn back and Candanbala counted her own misfortunes and started to weep loudly. Tears overflowed from her eyes. She said: "Hey Lord, This miserable wretch and her mother and father are gone. This householder's vow is forgotten. For what reason do you abandon this miserable wretch? No . . . no, god, you will not make me despair in this way. If even you will make me despair, then who will protect a wretch like me?" Having heard Candanbala's copious weeping, from compassion (*karuna*) that Lord turned to go back. Tears kept trickling from her eyes. Then that gracious (*bhakta vatsal*) Mahavir could not leave owing to Candanbala's emotion (*bhav*) and he stood in front of her, he could not go. Because Candanbala was in tears, Mahavir's vow was fulfilled. Mahavir came back and took the alms of boiled lentils from Candanbala's hands. The fast of five months and twenty-five days was ended.³⁵

The first most obvious difference is the increased attention to the moment of alms offering and accepting; it is unrepentantly melodramatic and also much longer.³⁶ Where in Hemacandra there is but a mark of punc-

³⁵ Dharni 1998:182–83.

³⁶ There is also a shift from making the offering to a guest to a Jain mendicant. This is particularly relevant for tellings in which the goal is to support the virtue of giving alms to monks.

tuation between the plea to take alms and the acceptance, here there is high drama lasting fifteen sentences. The lengthening of the moment introduces suspense into the narrative: Will he stop? Will he take alms? The moment is expanded into several acts: The first, Mahavir glances at her, sees that she does not fulfill his vow and turns away. The second, Candanbala begins to cry and call after him. The third, he turns back in response to her lament. The fourth, seeing her tears Mahavir approaches her with compassion and graciousness. This version uses the terms compassion (*karuna*) and caring about devotees (*bhakta vatsal*) to name reasons for Mahavir turning back and seeing her worthiness as a donor: an interplay between her tears and his compassion.³⁷ Finally Mahavir accepts her alms and the vows of both Mahavir and Candanbala are completed. At no time are we led to believe it is a foregone conclusion. In fact, the way it is couched in the contemporary telling — “because Candanbala was in tears . . . the vow was fulfilled” — leads one to quite the reverse: his vow’s fulfillment depends entirely on the extremity of her desire to offer him alms.

Let us examine Candanbala’s desire to offer alms and the tears which arise from this devotional sentiment. Candanbala gives her offering of alms without any thought of gain. In fact, the fruits of the act — freedom from bondage and the end of her sufferings — could have been achieved without first making an offering to a monk. Candanbala’s takes her vow after her assurance of release and is clearly articulated as arising out of devotional sentiment free from any sense of personal gain. This devotional sentiment (*bhav*) is the only acceptable sentiment for one who is to benefit spiritually from an act.³⁸ Humphrey and Laidlaw describe this sentiment as “meaning to mean it,” illuminating the centrality of intention at the same time as allowing flexibility within that sentiment.³⁹ Though there is great flexibility within proper sentiments, Jains have articulated concern over those who focus on the fruits

³⁷ Elsewhere Mahavir’s compassion is named by the terms: *anukampa*, *krpa*, *daya* as well as *karuna*. *Bhakt vatsal* was an uncommon term applied to Mahavir which may be because the term comes from Vaisnav theology and because “caring about devotees” seems more partial and less like equanimity.

³⁸ Babb 1996:60; Cort 2001:140–41; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:212; Kelting 2001:196–98; Reynell 1985:30–31.

³⁹ Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, Chapter Nine throughout.

of their acts. When one performs a religious act, the act is ideally performed in a disinterested way. There are two kinds of fruits of an act. The first, worldly gain, is never considered an acceptable reason for performing a fast, though there are certainly fasts, for example, which are performed because of their widely known worldly benefits — for the health and long life of one's husband (*saubhagya*).⁴⁰ Jains juggle the goals of merit (*punya*) acquisition with the ideal of karma reduction.⁴¹ The second kind of fruits of one's acts — those spiritual benefits that arise from binding particularly good forms of karma or from the reduction of karma — is a more complex issue. On one hand, the desire to do spiritually beneficial acts is part of having the correct sentiment, but on the other to focus on one's own gains, however spiritual, is seen as suspect and diminishes those benefits.⁴² The correct answer then would be a devotional one: a Jain performs their religious acts out of devotion to the religion, the Jinas, the texts, or the mendicants.

In a sermon, Devguptavijay, a Shvetambar Tapa Gaccha mendicant, said: "Candanbala just wanted to perform the veneration of Jain mendicants (*guru vandan*)."⁴³ Her vow is indicative of her proper sentiment — her devotion to Jain mendicants. In a contemporary lay manual, *Shri Pancapratikraman Sutro Vivecan Sahit*, the story of Candanbala is given in the form of a drama that was used at the fast-breaking ceremonies for the Candanbala Fast (*tap*).⁴⁴ Candanbala says: "Oh! A great ascetic has come here, I will give him alms before I break my fast, my fast is fruitful and complete!"⁴⁵ In Krishna worship, the joy of having one's food offering accepted extends beyond a recognition of the possible merit gained to participation in an embracing discourse of food, love, and

⁴⁰ Cort 2001:140–41; Kelting 2001:45–47; Laidlaw 1995:225; Reynell 1991:55.

⁴¹ Cort 2001:139–40; Kelting 2001:46–47; Laidlaw 1995:227–29; Reynell 1991:56.

⁴² Babb 1996:91–93; Laidlaw 1995:229.

⁴³ Muni Devguptavijayji, 7 July 2001, Pune, Maharashtra. Devguptavijayji was in residence in Pune for the rainy season and Candanbala's story was the subject of several of his sermons.

⁴⁴ Elsewhere, I discuss reenactments of the Candanbala story and the interplay between text and ritual drama throughout the fast and its fast-breaking ceremony (Kelting 2006).

⁴⁵ Kelting 2006:11.

intimacy.⁴⁶ By offering her food to a monk before eating, Candanbala evokes the Vaishnav trope of offering mind, body and wealth to the divine before using them herself; this model of offering, mind, body and wealth to Krishna before use is central to Pushtimarg Vaishnavism and permeates much of the Hindu devotionism of western India where Jainism likewise flourishes.⁴⁷

Candanbala's tears flow spontaneously because she is denied the joy of feeding Mahavir. In his work on Krishna devotion, Hawley argues that the *gopis'* tears must be spontaneous to carry meaning in their contexts (though the poets use of the *gopis'* tears are, of course, self-conscious productions).⁴⁸ The overflowing of emotion shown by the tears of Krishna devotees is understood to represent their spontaneous and uncontrollable emotional states.⁴⁹ In the case of Candanbala, her tears must likewise be spontaneous to be meaningful; for Candanbala to cry in order to get the attention of Mahavir would break both the rules of how one behaves in ritual contexts and at worst might be seen as a worldly request (*ninda*) of a Jina.⁵⁰ But Hawley's writing suggests the self-conscious production and reproduction of Candanbala's tears in Jain narratives, hymns, and dramas. Jain authors (and those who paint Jain murals) have drawn our attention to Candanbala's tears again and again. The multivalence of her tears allows for Candanbala to have the correct sentiment while still participating in the emotional discourse of bhakti devotionism.

⁴⁶ Bennett 1990:196; Toomey 1990:163.

⁴⁷ Babb 1996:178. Babb argues that the differences in ritual cultures between Vaisnavs and Jains of the same class and caste groupings hinges on the notion of sharing in enjoyment with Krishna (*sambhoga*) and of abandoning passions in imitation of the ascetic indifference to offerings of the Jinas (1996:174–81). See also Barz 1976, Bennett 1990, and Pocock 1973.

⁴⁸ Hawley 2005:105. The *gopis* are the milkmaids of Braj who fall in love with Krishna. Their devotion is initially rewarded by Krishna's attention but later, when Krishna leaves Braj forever, it remains unanswered and essentially ignored.

⁴⁹ Hawley 2005:105.

⁵⁰ Kelting 2001, Chapter Five.

Tears and the Worthy Donor

In the contemporary narrative version in *Sol Mahasatio*, we are told about Candanbala's vow to postpone eating until after she is able to feed a worthy recipient; the worthy recipient is, in Jain narratives, always a Jain mendicant. Candanbala offers the quintessential gift to the worthy recipient (*supatra dana*) — offering food to a Jain mendicant.⁵¹ The earliest telling of her story that I have found is in Jinadasa's *Avashyaka Curni* as a story of the merits of proper alms-giving.⁵² In one popular collection of sermons from the late eighteenth century (*Upadeshaprasad*), Candanbala's story is included in a sermon collection as illustrative of the rewards of being a donor (*dana*, especially *supatradana* — giving to mendicants).⁵³ Gifts in the spirit of devotion (*bhakti*) are *dana*⁵⁴ and conversely, those acts named *dana* including Candanbala's offering of lentils to Mahavir, are acts of devotion.

This shift in the narratives is key to thinking about the ways in which her tears are presently constructed. Candanbala's tears arise out of her disappointment when Mahavir turns back from her door. Her happiness at his arrival and the potential of making an offering turn to sorrow and self-reproach when he walks away. The tensions at the feeding of any Jain monk or nun hinge on the potential of being deemed an unworthy donor or of having unacceptable food. Mendicants are enjoined to evaluate the virtue of potential donors.⁵⁵ The rules of accepting alms contain the real, though uncommon, potential of being rejected as a donor because of an infraction.⁵⁶ The popular Candanbala hymn with which I opened this essay, goes on to describe Candanbala: "Candanbala holds out the food and that monk turns away from there.

⁵¹ Laidlaw 1995:296.

⁵² Balbir 1983:150.

⁵³ Shri Virat 1982–1983:27.

⁵⁴ Cort 2001:105.

⁵⁵ *Acaranga Sutra* 2.1.2.1–4. In addition, the rules of begging alms (including evaluating the worthiness of donors) are outlined explicitly and carefully in the *Dashavailika Sutra* (5.1) which monks (and in some groups, nuns) are all expected to memorize.

⁵⁶ Laidlaw 1995:309. In addition, householders are enjoined to be generous while mendicants are expected to be careful and resistant to pleas that they take more food. The negotiations between the Jain laywoman (usually) and the Jain mendicant center around this tension (Laidlaw 1995:312–16).

‘O Lord, what did I do wrong?’ and tears rained down.” The hymn voices Candanbala’s concern that she has committed some infraction. In this hymn and in the story, Candanbala perceives herself to have been deemed unworthy as a donor and she despairs. In fact, as we know, Mahavir rejects her alms for the simple reason that she is not crying — a part of his own almost capricious vow — and has nothing whatsoever to do with her virtue. In fact, this same hymn has Mahavir think to himself: “Who is this smiling great ascetic who has a similar resolve?” Mahavir sees Candanbala’s virtue immediately and compares her resolve to uphold her own vow as similar to his own but cannot reward it until after he sees her tears.

Returning to the drama in *Shri Pancapratikraman Sutro Vivecan Sahit*, we find Candanbala’s lament is dramatized with the instructions that Candanbala should lament while tears stream down her face after Mahavir walks away and then she should say: “O great soul! Come back! Turn back! You who are my opportunity to fulfill destiny, don’t go away! Hey! What sort of bad luck do I have? I am unable to gain the fortune of the wish-fulfilling jewel.” Now sobbing, she should add: “O great soul!”⁵⁷ The pathos of the moment is dramatized by her frustration at not knowing what causes Mahavir to reject her offering. Candanbala breaks from the very formalized ways in which alms are offered to monks into despair because she seems to have made some mistake that causes Mahavir to turn back. This unseemly lament dramatizes her internal state of despair which might be shared by anyone whose alms were rejected. The fear for the Jain lay donor is that in the vast esoteria of mendicant rules and the particular vows a mendicant might have taken, the layperson may overlook or be ignorant of some small but crucial rule or injunction.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Parekh 1997:381.

⁵⁸ Though it is not especially common for a monk or nun to reject alms completely from a Jain household, I know of several cases in Pune: One Digambar monk left a house without taking any alms because he saw they had anti-roach powder, one Shvetambar monk left a house because the family was eating green vegetables on a no-green day, and another Shvetambar monk left abruptly when someone lit a stove to heat up tea for him. All three of these infractions were the kinds of mistakes few Jain families would make but the potential of breaking more complex rules hovers over every alms giving. It is more common that a monk or nun will reject a particular item or take the barest minimum from a lax household.

Tears at the Doorway

Candanbala is often depicted in paintings at Jain temples. In each she is shown standing at the threshold in chains, wearing white clothes, head shaven, with a winnowing basket in her hands (sometimes with the lentils spilling out of the corner) and with tears streaming from her eyes portrayed so conspicuously that they are visible from a distance to us and also, presumably, to Mahavir. Though Candanbala's tears are clearly visible signs of her spontaneous emotion there is value in pausing to examine what these tears might be communicating. While Candanbala might be crying over her misfortunes at the hand of the merchant's wife (as in Hemacandra's telling) or she might have tears of joy at seeing Mahavir, the emotional discourse discernible in the texts tell us that these copious tears indicate the intense grief she feels when Mahavir walks by without taking alms. Even this however could indicate two related emotions. On one hand the narratives suggest that Candanbala's tears arise from the despair of being an unworthy donor. On the other hand, she may be feeling the pain of separation from Mahavir — similar to that devotion that arises in the gopis out of separation from Krishna (*viraha bhakti*) when he leaves Braj forever⁵⁹ — as he walks by and leaves her devoted offering unaccepted.

Ebersole writes of Japanese ritual weeping that "Through the shedding of tears, a ritual weeper often seeks to represent himself or herself as being in an appropriate state vis-à-vis another person in a given situation; alternatively, ritual tears may mark the fact that the expected and appropriate relationship has been broken by one party."⁶⁰ While ritual weeping is quite different from Candanbala's spontaneous and personal tears, Ebersole's distinction is helpful in identifying two ways in which tears work religiously. Candanbala is seen as a worthy donor by virtue of her tears; in fact, her tears transform her into the only worthy donor. However, Candanbala does not know about Mahavir's vow at all — much less the details of it — and therefore is not representing herself as a worthy donor through her tears. Her tears are not choreographed. Rather, her tears arise out of her sense that the expected relationship

⁵⁹ Hawley 2005:97.

⁶⁰ Ebersole 2005:26.

between a devoted donor and a Jain monk is broken by Mahavir's rejection of her offering.

Candanbala's tears are personal (not communal), spontaneous, disruptive, and unexpected which is why Mahavir turns around. Nelson writing about charismatic church services discusses "feeling rules" which guide the participants emotional responses to the services through "collectively recognized norms of emotive and expressive behavior."⁶¹ Candanbala transgresses the norms of behavior by weeping when her offering of alms is ignored. Candanbala breaks the "feeling rules" which mark the interchange between a donor and a mendicant, and a devotee and the Jinas.⁶² As social individuals Jains likewise shy away from the expression of personal emotion in public especially in religious contexts.⁶³ In my observations, I found crying to be acceptable for Jains at weddings and funerals. but personal crying both of children and adults is actively discouraged in unstructured contexts. Crying is, most significantly, proscribed in religious contexts. The longer lists of acts considered to be disrespectful (*ashatnas*) to Jainism include wailing, lamentation and also letting tears fall in a temple.⁶⁴ During my research on Jain devotional singing, I was repeatedly told that one should not show excessive emotion — indicated primarily by laughing or crying or any loss of control — during rituals. In my observations, I found that if a person began to cry in a temple, they were encouraged to step outside and if they wailed they were told to go immediately. Tears at rituals were uncommon enough events — even at memorial rituals — that it seemed that the Jains I knew have fully internalized this restriction. Tears in Jain religious contexts are transgressive which makes Candanbala's prominent and celebrated tears a site for negotiating the anti-emotion tensions within Jainism.⁶⁵ Bassor's writing on Jewish tears

⁶¹ Nelson 1996:404.

⁶² Laidlaw describes the ritual of offering alms a Jain mendicant with an eye to the formality of the act (Laidlaw 1995:309–13).

⁶³ Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994:239. I have found this to be the case in my research as well. In fact, most discussions of emotion were redirected into discussions of religious ethics.

⁶⁴ Williams 1963:225–29.

⁶⁵ Similarly, weeping in Taiwan is restricted to particular contexts such as weddings and funerals and thus the weeping of the charismatic Buddhists transgresses the emotional discourse of Chinese culture (Huang 2003:73).

suggests an emotional discourse that resonates with Candanbala's tears: "Sometimes tears represent expressions of infinite religious yearnings and at other times, tokens of remorse and despair."⁶⁶ Candanbala is simultaneously expressing despair (and, perhaps, remorse when she reflects on her offering as rejected because of some error in her behavior) and overflowing with the frustration of her religious yearnings but in doing so defines the contours of one aspect of Jain religious emotional discourse which focuses on the "impossibility" of Jainism.

Candanbala's tears are iconic of the Jain experience of devotion; she is left standing at the door while Mahavir passes by without responding to her call. Babb describes the absence of the Jina:

It is a fact of the highest importance about Jain ritual culture that worshipers do not engage in any transactions whatsoever with the Tirthankar. The reason of course is the fifth kalyanak, the Tirthankar's liberation. . . . liberation is the complete cessation of such transactions. . . . He responds to no prayers or petitions, and dispenses no saving grace; he exists as an "other" in the relationship constructed by the rite, but transactionally he is nonexistent.⁶⁷

This non-transactional experience of Jain worship so well described by Babb indicates the basic difficulty of being Jain. One must simply do it by oneself and with no response from the object of devotion. Jainism is in fact seen by Jains as very difficult and Jain hymns articulate the wishes of Jains for help in being better Jains. In the course of his research with Shvetambar Jains in Jaipur, James Laidlaw was repeatedly told of the difficulty of being Jain. One Jain told him:

Jainism is the most difficult religion. In fact it is impossible. We get no help from any gods or from anyone. . . . In other religions you can pray to God for help, and maybe God comes down to help. But Jainism is not a religion of coming down. In Jainism it is we who must go up. We have only to help ourselves.⁶⁸

Lay Jains in Maharashtra used similar language when explaining to me how difficult Jainism can be compared to other religions. One woman

⁶⁶ Bassar 2005:185.

⁶⁷ Babb 1996:91–92.

⁶⁸ Laidlaw 1995:26.

in Pune put it to me succinctly: “When we are in the temple, we are alone.” It is this aloneness that is so poignant for Jains and which is so fully illustrated in Candanbala’s story.

Accepting the Jain discourse of the ‘impossibility’ of their religion and the difficulty of having no assistance, frustration can be seen as a background emotion (after Nussbaum 2001:71) for Jains. Jains draw their ability to continue worship from a belief in the correctness of their tradition and from the rich narrative traditions which support that belief. This frustration and its tenuous resolution manifest in the Jain empathetic identity with Candanbala. Candanbala’s tears legitimate the frustration of Jain devotees as they negotiate the uneasy terrain between the cool detachment of the Jinas and the emotional excesses of *bhakti* devotionism.

In my book, *Singing to the Jinas*, I discussed the ways that Jain laywomen constructed their understandings of devotion (*bhakti*) through devotional singing.⁶⁹ Many of these hymns ask for the attention of the Jinas and the blessing of their presence in ways hauntingly similar to Candanbala. One very popular hymn, *Ekvar Ekvar Parshva Prabhuji*, asks for the presence of the Jina, Parshvanath:

Just once, Lord Parshva, Come to my temple!
Come to my temple, that’s my request.
My request is that you come, I beg you to do this.
That is my song’s devoted wish.
With the flowers of the soul, I spoke to you.
Take these flowers and bring back your precious ones.⁷⁰

In another, *Mara Sonanu Samavasaran*, the singers sing:

O God, accept our request, O Lord,
Cut off our sorrow and give us the joy of liberation.⁷¹

In *Mahavir Shri Bhagavan*, desire for a response is palpable:

⁶⁹ Kelting 2001:108–36.

⁷⁰ Kelting 2001:114.

⁷¹ Kelting 2001:90.

Have mercy and accept our devotion, Mahavir Shri Bhagavan!
 Distressed I went to your door, O Mahavir!
 Give me your blessing, take us into your heart, O Mahavir!⁷²

Finally, in *Shankheshvar Parshvanath Stavan (Antarjami Sun Alavesar)* — one of the most widely printed and performed hymns — the author writes:

Inner Lord, hear my song, the glory of the Three Worlds is yours.
 Hearing you, I came to your door, you carry me across the sorrow of birth and death.
 Do this for your servant, O King, give us the joy of liberation. O Lord!
 O Gem of Shankheshvar, Sahib, pay attention to this request
 Says Jinaharsa, rescue me, your servant, from the sea of emotions,
 Do this for your servant, O King, give us the joy of liberation. O Lord!⁷³

The writers of these hymns ask for help from the Jinas in several forms: presence — “come to my temple!” —; attentiveness — “give me your blessing, take us into your heart” —; uplift — “you carry me across the sorrow of birth and death” and “rescue me from the sea of emotions” —; and gifts of equanimity and perfection — “cut off our sorrow and give us the joy of liberation.” Even more often they beg the Jina to accept their devotion — “take these flowers and bring back your precious ones” and “have mercy and accept our devotion.” The Jain devotee is never able to know if their worship is truly acceptable because the Jina (once liberated from rebirth) will not answer; the inescapable fact looming behind all these requests is that the author (and singer) knows full well that the requests will not be answered.

Hymn after hymn sings of the devotee waiting at the door begging for the Jina to arrive so that they can have darshan and be blessed. Requests for anything from the liberated Jina could theoretically be a sign of incorrect belief (*nidana*) but Cort shows that the early Jain theologians (both Digambar — in the *Mulacara* of Vattakera — and Shvetambar — in the early sixth century *Avashyaka Nirvyukti* attributed to Bhadrabahu) argue that such passions that arise in the context of

⁷² Kelting 2001:133.

⁷³ Kelting 2001:133–34.

devotion to the Jinas are not a sign of incorrect belief though they are seen by theologians to be inferior to detachment.⁷⁴ In the *caturvimshati-stava* (*Logassa Sutra*) which is one of the six daily obligations of all Jain mendicants (and part of the daily practice of many lay Jains), one finds in the verses the following lines: “May they, the supreme perfected ones (*siddhas*) . . . give the gain of health and wisdom, and the best, highest meditative absorption (*samadhi*). May the perfected ones . . . give me perfection.”⁷⁵ From this most orthodox of texts, we see the author asking for a response from the Jinas. In a gloss on this problematic verse, the *Avashyaka Nirvyukti*, it is stated: “They attain the gain of health and knowledge, and death in meditative absorption, by supreme bhakti of the excellent Jinas who have destroyed positive passion and negative passion.”⁷⁶ Cort uses the explanations of the *caturvimshati-stava* (*Logassa*) as examples of how the Jain tradition has accepted and theorized about bhakti. Here we see that in a particular reading, these requests, though perhaps passionate, are acceptable as long as the objects of devotion are the Jinas and as long as the requests are not for worldly gains.⁷⁷

Now let us return finally to that most popular of the Candanbala hymns with which I open this article. It is the hymn most women sang first for me when asked about Candanbala hymns, is included both on virtually all Candanbala cassettes and in many fasting hymn books.⁷⁸ In this hymn we hear the story of Candanbala told in a condensed form; it is clear that the author of the hymn assumes that the listeners know the story. Here are the key verses for our discussion:

“Come, come, my god, to my empty door, to my lonely courtyard!
Crying Candanbala begs you today to come to my lonely courtyard.”

⁷⁴ Cort 2002:71–72.

⁷⁵ Cort 2002:70.

⁷⁶ *Avashyaka Nirvyukti* in Cort 2002:72. The Digambar theologian Vattakera similarly writes: “For those whose aims are successful through bhakti directed toward the Jinas, that bhakti, even though full of passion, is nonetheless not a worldly desire (*nidana*)” (Cort 2002:71).

⁷⁷ Cort 2002:73.

⁷⁸ The hymn was included on a VCD of a dramatic performance of the Candanbala story which I was shown by lay Jains and at each of the dramatic performances of her story that I have observed in Pune.

“Come, come Vir Svami, come Mahavir,” she sang,
 “Look at my tears and accept my offering of lentils.”

Above I discussed Candanbala’s fear of being an unworthy donor but here I wish to draw our attention to the first and last verses which are her offering of alms to the receding Mahavir. She, while crying, begs for Mahavir to come to her “empty and lonely courtyard” in language that resonates with the many hymns that beg for the Jinas to show their presence (or give *darshan*) in a temple.⁷⁹ Finally the hymn ends with Candanbala drawing Mahavir’s attention to her tears, “Look at my tears,” as an indicator of the worthiness of her offering of lentils. This is the crux of Candanbala’s success: her tears make her worthy of the blessing of Mahavir.

Candanbala’s tears, unlike the disinterested compassion of a nearly enlightened Jina, are an excessive emotion. Her tears overflow and she cries out to Mahavir in despair. In the contemporary tellings and in visual images, Candanbala’s melodramatic despair signified by her oversized tears causes Mahavir to act compassionately and causes the audience and viewers to identify with her suffering. In her analysis of excessive emotion in Buddhist narrative and its role in causing moral action, Heim writes: “Yet it is in narrative, through literary effect, that the emotions themselves are engaged. When the texts cause us to feel something, they insert us into the world outside of ourselves and may evoke the first glimmerings of moral consciousness.”⁸⁰ A Jain’s identification with Candanbala makes meaningful the religious frustration of Jains and encourages them to continue to worship. During another sermon by the Jain mendicant Devguptavijayji about Candanbala, his eyes filled with tears when he spoke of Mahavir walking by Candanbala and how she must have felt.⁸¹ As he gathered himself, the congregation heard one young woman who was softly weeping. The women sitting near me at the sermon drew my attention to the weeping and agreed that the young woman was filled with proper sentiment (*bhav*) because she was identifying with Candanbala. The next day that

⁷⁹ Kelting 2001. Hymns with this theme can be found throughout the text.

⁸⁰ Heim 2003:551

⁸¹ Muni Devguptavijayji, 6 August 2001.

young woman decided to undertake the Candanbala Fast and also to perform other additional Jain devotional acts focused on Mahavir. This young woman's identification with Candanbala as a result of hearing the story poignantly told leads to her increased religious practice. In this we find a parallel to Heim's argument which establishes a schemata where one moves from the narrative to the emotion to the "stirrings of moral consciousness." Thus the melodrama of Candanbala's tears is virtuous drama because it leads to the identification with her that is necessary for compelling Jains to further moral acts even in the face of Jina's disinterest.

The Candanbala story happens before Mahavir's enlightenment and so he has not yet reached that perfect state of emotional detachment. Mahavir is able to respond to Candanbala's tears and mark Candanbala as special, as one worthy of Mahavir's compassionate attention. Candanbala is meaningful because of the response of Mahavir. Without Mahavir turning around, Jains would be unlikely to attach much meaning a woman who suffered much and was deemed an unworthy donor. The fact that Mahavir's return is, in essence, disinterested⁸² in no way diminishes the fact that it is Candanbala's devotion, overflowing into tears which leads him to return and take alms: his vow is fulfilled, her vow is fulfilled and she and everyone else are filled with unending happiness.

While the lay Jain cannot know the detailed workings of karma, one can continue to show devotion. Like the people of Kaushambi who try and try to make a proper offering to Mahavir as he turns away again and again, each pious Jain will sing hymns of praise and offer their devotion to the Jinas without knowing whether they are truly acceptable.⁸³ For Candanbala, the rejection of her alms without explanation

⁸² Heim replies to Nussbaum's objections to compassion as a grounding of moral action because of the problem of partiality towards particular suffering individuals (thereby showing preference) which, Heim argues, may be mitigated by meditational practices focussed on developing equanimity (Heim 2003:550 n. 18). The same argument could be made of the Jinas as they approach enlightenment. After enlightenment the Jinas no longer respond even in a detached manner.

⁸³ Jains are very clear that the Jinas will not interact with material offerings and likewise Jains see the "offerings" of fruits, sweets, and rice as items that have been abandoned in imitation of the Jinas (Babb 1996:91–95). Hymn singing and other devotional practices challenge this model of abandonment. It is clear that Jains are

proved to be too much. She is offering all that she can think of (and all that she has) and it is not enough. But Candanbala's tears — the evidence of her devotion — are the perfect completion to her offering. Perhaps the popularity of Candanbala in narratives, paintings, and hymns develops because Candanbala's tears stand in for the tears of all Jains who fear that their worship may somehow be incorrect or insufficient and who continue to worship in hope that their devotional sentiments — even an excessive show of emotion — might miraculously complete their worship.

In many religious traditions, tears call on the gods to respond, but tears are not necessarily efficacious (Patton 2005:266; Hawley 2005:105). Mahavir, though, turns around; that compassionate act in response to Candanbala's suffering is miraculous. The Candanbala story asks Jains to identify with her thwarted hope in order to see reward in continued worship of the passionless Jina. For contemporary Jains who know not only that the Jinas do not respond, but also that there is no possibility for enlightenment in this era,⁸⁴ the narrative of Candanbala's tears harkens back to a better time: a time when miracles were possible, a time when the Jinas would respond to the tears of their devotees.*

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participating in bhakti devotionalism but Jains have shared with me their concerns that the desires expressed might be unacceptable according to Jain doctrine.

⁸⁴ In Jain cosmology, the present era (the fifth and sixth spokes of the descending time period — *avasarpīna*) is a time in which enlightenment is impossible (Dundas 2002:89).

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Gaia, God, and the Internet: The History of Evolution and the Utopia of Community in Media Society

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Abstract

The question of religious content in the media has occupied many scholars studying the relationship between media and religion. However, the study of recent religious thought offers a promising perspective for the analysis of the cultural perceptions of various media technologies. After the Internet first appeared in American households in the middle of the 1990s, a variety of religious or spiritual interpretations of the new medium emerged. The far-reaching ideas see the Internet as the first step of the realisation of a divine entity consisting of the collective human mind. In this vision, the emergence of the Internet is considered to be part of a teleological evolutionary model. Essential for the religious and evolutionary construction of the Internet is an incorporation of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's model of evolution — especially the idea of the noosphere, and its adoption in media theory by Marshall McLuhan. The connections of these ideas to James Lovelock's Gaia theory illustrate the notion of the Internet as an organic entity. The article outlines the processes of the reception of religious and evolutionary ideas which led to the recent interpretations of the Internet as a divine sphere.

Keywords

Gaia, Internet, media, Marshall McLuhan, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, technology

The Religious Reception of Media Technology

Media are not neutral. They are not *objective* means for observation or communication in the hands of autonomous human agents, but they contain within themselves the conditions of a certain perception of

reality, and of a certain construction of reality. This crucial point shaped the concerns of the *Toronto School of Communication* which was founded in the mid-20th century by media theorists such as Marshall McLuhan and Harold Innis.¹ This early approach, mainly influenced by research on propaganda, dealt with the question of the manipulation of the media consumer — the basic question of media effects: “What are the media doing with their consumers?” More recently, the German media researcher Siegfried Schmidt and others have directed the focus of media research to the other side of the coin — the central question of media reception: “What are consumers doing with the media?”²

Media technology is always embedded in a certain cultural and social pattern of reception (*Deutungsmuster*); this becomes particularly evident when new technology is introduced. Media are — apart from their content — received differently in diverse social, cultural and religious milieus. For the scientific study of religion, as well as cultural studies, not only is the question of media content pivotal, but so is the issue of the cultural embedment of a medium in general in attempts to understand the valuation of specific media content by particular groups of recipients. In 2000, Burkhard Gladigow addressed both aspects of this issue in his notion of the *iconic turn*: on the one hand is the question of “God in cyberspace,”³ demonstrated by the presentation of religious content on the Internet, and on the other hand is the question of the “new mythologies” of the medium Internet itself: “Es ist auffallend, wie schnell die Internet-Besucher, unabhängig von den Selbstdarstellungen bestimmter religiöser Gruppierungen, das gesamte Netz, Simulation, Virtualität und ständige Metamorphosen, mit religiösen oder göttlichen Prädikaten bedacht haben.”⁴

Previous research has focused especially on how mostly homogenous religious groups are dealing with electronic media, particularly when there is a conflict between the use of new technology and religious values. Thus, studies have analyzed such social phenomena as the “domestication” of the telephone by the Amish in the United States,

¹ See Innis 1951; Marshall McLuhan 1994, also see Meyrowitz 1985.

² See Schmidt 2000:76–84.

³ See Gladigow 2005a:287.

⁴ Gladigow 2005a:288.

and, more recently, the introduction of the Internet among ultraorthodox Jewish groups in Israel.⁵ Media theorist Heidi Campbell is convinced that those religious communities which are basically critical towards technology, must undergo a process of *spiritualisation* of a new media technology — in other words, the assumed secular media technology first has to be contextualized in a religious pattern of interpretation, upon which it becomes usable in accordance with religious purposes and dogma.⁶

In comparison with research on these apparently homogenous religious communities it is a far more complex undertaking to trace dominant patterns of interpretation which hardly can be attributed to a certain religious or social milieu. These multi-faceted research agendas might accentuate partly religious, and partly secular aspects. This article tries to illuminate the diffuse network of the cultural reception of the medium Internet as part of a larger discourse on religion and media philosophy. The expression “diffuse” (from Latin *diffusus*) is understood in the sense of amalgamation, vagueness and reciprocal pervasion of the religious, social, political, economic, philosophical and technological factors of this discourse field.⁷

The most far-reaching interpretations of the Internet are characterized by claiming relevance not only for certain types of societies (e.g. post-industrial societies) or specific applications (e.g. education), but for the evolution and general history of humankind or even for the cosmological history of the universe. Ontological patterns of interpretation include to a greater or lesser extent metaphysical assumptions on the nature of the Internet and the common notion of virtual reality. Most prominently and frequently cited is Michael Heim, who introduced the notion of the *metaphysics of cyberspace* in 1993⁸ — the neologisms “cyberplatonism,”⁹

⁵ See Zimmerman-Umbel 1992; Barzilai and Barzilai-Nahon 2005.

⁶ See Campbell 2005:1–8.

⁷ See for an overview Bühl 1997.

⁸ Heim did not write much on the metaphysics of cyberspace — the only relevant passage is an associative *staccato* of metaphors, reaching from the Holy Grail and King Arthur up to Wagner's Parsifal. By these ideas, initiated by the quote of a lesser known computer scientist, Heim attempts to document the esoteric essence of the Internet. See Heim 1993:123–28.

⁹ See List 1996.

“cybergnosis”¹⁰ and “techgnosis”¹¹ reflect the creative reception of this concept in post-modern media philosophy that primarily focuses on overcoming the human body by means of “virtual technologies.”¹²

Apart from these assumptions there is an evolutionary discourse, which is not limited to a Gnostic-philosophical interpretation of today’s media technology but which promises the dawn of a new age with the prophecy of an actual transformation of humankind. Here, it is noteworthy that a religious interpretation of the history of evolution and an organic/holistic view of the planet earth (*Gaia*) are related to the appearance of computer technology and the Internet. The link between a religious connotation of evolutionary history and media theory is based upon the work of the philosopher and Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and its specific reception by the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980). Both McLuhan’s metaphor of the *global village* and Teilhard’s concept of the evolutionary revelation of god — beginning with the biosphere, continuing with the noosphere, and finalizing in the divine point Omega — are prevalently adopted in the current discourse on the Internet. Within the framework of Gaia theory initiated by James Lovelock (born 1919), an interpretation of the Internet as an organic part of earth’s history enforces the idea of understanding the current technological development as continuing the natural evolution of life on this planet.

In the following, a hermeneutic analysis in the sense of a history of reception (*Rezeptionsgeschichte*) shall present the contour of this partly religious, partly philosophical discourse more precisely. In consideration of this hermeneutic premise, concepts that presume an unchanging semantic structure and rely on conceptual categories, such as “being unrecognized” (*Verkanntwerden*) or “misinterpretation,” are not applicable. Rather, this analysis will trace new contextualisations of certain ideas with regard to concrete patterns of selection and interpretation.¹³ Thus, some exponents of the community ideal of cyberspace are first presented, followed by a detailed analysis of the central concept of the

¹⁰ See Böhme 1996.

¹¹ See Davis 1998.

¹² Referring the body discourse in cyberspace see Krüger 2004a.

¹³ See Jauß 1987; Stausberg 1998:2–4.

noosphere in the works of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Marshall McLuhan. Finally, a closer treatment of the Gaia theory and its religious reception is provided. In order to uncover the specific processes of reception and selection applied by contemporary cyber-visionaries, it is essential to consider the historical contexts of religious and philosophical interpretations of evolution which coined the dominating patterns of recent reception.

Cyberutopia

When the World Wide Web spread in the mid-1990s into more and more American companies and private households and the various earlier computer networks were substituted or brought together, technological visionaries construed the Internet as harbinger of a new age. One of the most prominent figures in this context was the American computer scientist Mark Pesce, who established the first generally binding standard for the visual presentation of virtual reality (*Virtual Reality Modeling Language, VRML*) in 1994. In his numerous publications, presentations at conferences, and media appearances, he not only showcased his technological innovations but he related them to his vivid vision of the future Internet. Thus, in his book *Playful World*, amid the narration of the invention of VRML he introduces the Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin as the most significant but long-forgotten prophet of the Internet: "... no one foresaw the importance and comprehensive impact of the World Wide Web. But, over fifty years ago, one fairly obscure scientist did predict a coming transformation of the human mind, the birth of collective intelligence, and the emergence of a new way of knowing."¹⁴

Along with the idea that all human beings will soon be united spiritually, Pesce adopted Teilhard's concept of the noosphere:

We can't know for sure if the Web is the same thing as the noosphere, or if the Web represents part of what Teilhard envisioned. But it feels that way.... If Teilhard was right, the Web is part of our evolution, as much an essential element of humanity as our acute eyes, our crafty hands, and our wonderful brains.¹⁵

¹⁴ Pesce 2000:164.

¹⁵ Pesce 2000:170.

Equating the Internet with the noosphere, Pesce implied that this technology was no ordinary media innovation, such as radio or television had been at their time. According to Pesce, the outstanding emergence of the Internet refers to a spiritual dimension:

Meine Arbeit rund um WebEarth hat viel mit Spiritualität zu tun, mit der Idee der Gaia, des Planeten als Lebewesen. Wenn ich diese Arbeit Leuten zum ersten Mal zeige, packt es sie oft richtig; manche weinen.... Mit VRML wird die Noosphäre viel greifbarer werden. Die Leute werden sie als echten Ort erkennen, obwohl sie nur aus Daten besteht.¹⁶

In speaking so, Pesce connects the ideas of Teilhard with Gaia theory, a perspective that has had great significance for New Age thinkers and environmentalists such as Ken Wilber and Terence McKenna. Thus, the Internet is conceptualised as an organic part of the earth, destined to come into existence as part of the natural evolutionary process.

The most comprehensive application of Teilhard's ideas to the area of cyber-discourse can be found in the work of American theologian Jennifer Cobb. In her book, *Cybergrace: The Search for God in the Digital Space* (1998), Cobb — who has been an IT professional for more than 15 years — interprets cyberspace as an unlimited space for the development of the intellectual, spiritual and emotional potentials of humanity. If human beings could understand the true significance of computer technologies, then, according to Cobb, the world can be experienced anew as a divine reality beyond the dualism of mind and matter.¹⁷

In the ongoing process of spiritual evolution, cyberspace has a special role to play.... In this vision, the spiritual basis of the universe is understood as creative events unfolding in time.... Cyberspace can help guide us toward a reconciliation of the major schisms of our time, those between science and spirit, between the organic world and the world that we create.¹⁸

Principally, Cobb draws on Teilhard's multi-level evolutionary model with a particular focus on the leap from the biosphere to the noosphere.

¹⁶ Bennahum 1997.

¹⁷ See Cobb 1998:8–11.

¹⁸ Cobb 1998:43.

However, she is of the opinion that Teilhard's ideas can be accurately understood only in the face of the emergence of cyberspace: "This distinctly non-traditional evolutionary idea may strike us as odd until we consider the phenomenon of cyberspace, that electronically supported layer of human consciousness that now encircles the globe."¹⁹

Like many other Protestant theologians in the United States, Cobb seeks an alliance between the sciences and Christian theology and legitimates her religious interpretation of cyberspace as the evolution of divine creativity in the universe.²⁰

Creative process forms the soul of cyberspace. The source of richness and potential in this vast, electronic web of experience is spirit. The divine expresses itself in the digital terrain through the vast, global communication networks that are now beginning to display rudimentary self-organizing properties.²¹

From Cobb's viewpoint, humankind must recognize the progress of computer technology as a divine plan: "It is when this knowledge comes fully into our conscious awareness that our deeper journey with cyberspace will truly have begun."²²

The physicist and posthumanist thinker Frank Tipler, professor of mathematical physics at New Orleans' Tulane University, goes a step further than Cobb. Together with the English cosmo-physicist John D. Barrow, Tipler published his chief scientific work, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, in 1986,²³ which included a teleological interpretation of the history of the universe. However, Tipler shot to fame with his book *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead*, published in 1994.²⁴ Here, he advocates the position of the so called natural theology, and he is absolutely convinced that only the sciences — above all mathematics and physics — will enable us to better understand god and the destination of human beings as part of divine creation:

¹⁹ Cobb 1998:85.

²⁰ Cobb 1998:12, 51–97.

²¹ Cobb 1998:44.

²² Cobb 1998:239.

²³ See Barrow and Tipler 1986.

²⁴ See Tipler 1994.

The only book which does not suffer from these limitations is the Book of Nature, the only book which God wrote with His/Her own hand, without human assistance. The book of nature is not limited by human understanding. The Book of Nature is the only reliable guide to the true Nature of God.²⁵

In his cosmological perspective, Tipler assumes that god has created the universe in order to unfold his own personality entirely through the coming history of the universe. The target, not only of the natural evolution on earth but also of the whole cosmological development, is presented as the point Omega. According to Tipler, humankind takes on the key role in this divine plan, being the only intelligent forms of life in the cosmos: through the emergence of artificially intelligent beings, which are created by men and are supposed to populate all galaxies, the whole universe shall be transformed into a single thinking unit, into a gigantic cosmic computer. The human race is only an intermediate stage in the history of evolution, and will eventually be overcome by posthuman entities.²⁶ When finally god is realized in the point Omega, then also the history of the universe will have come to an end:

At the instant the Omega Point is reached, life will have gained control of *all* matter and forces...; life will have spread into *all* spatial regions in all universes which could logically exist, and we will have stored an infinite amount of information, including all bits of knowledge which is logically possible to know. And this is the end.²⁷

Mark Pesce, Jennifer Cobb and Frank Tipler understand the concept of evolution outlined by Teilhard de Chardin in different ways, either as the spiritual evolution of humanity, or as an explicit unfolding of the Christian god. Apart from these differences, they share the assumption that the emergence of the Internet, and of networked information technology in general, is *the* crucial leap in earthly natural evolution, and they all apply a religious perspective in their interpretations of these phenomena.

²⁵ Tipler 1994:337.

²⁶ Concerning Frank Tipler and the general topic of posthumanism see Krüger 2004b:103–400.

²⁷ Barrow and Tipler 1986:677.

Teilhard de Chardin and Marshall McLuhan

These examples may have illustrated how the singular ideas of Teilhard de Chardin are perceived in the current cyber discourse — “googling” this topic with adequate keywords²⁸ will generate links on hundreds of similar academic and popular contributions that idealise Teilhard to be the great mastermind of the Internet. This strong reception within media discourse is remarkable since Teilhard de Chardin — as far as I can see — remained mute about media, with the exception of two short notes (see below). In my view, the work of Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, who eclectically picked up Teilhard’s ideas, prepared the ground for these ideas in media theory and cultivated so much interest. In the popular discourse, and sometimes even in academic discourse, both thinkers are even considered to be interchangeable. McLuhan is said to “flirt” with Teilhard’s ideas, their theories are assumed to be congruent,²⁹ and it is generally accepted that, “McLuhan’s ‘global village’ was nothing other than Teilhard’s ‘noosphere.’”³⁰ Therefore, it is essential in the following section to examine the relation between McLuhan and Teilhard de Chardin, to illuminate the popular and evidently dominating synthesis of McLuhan’s idea of the global village and Teilhard’s noosphere, a synthesis which anticipates a religious interpretation of the Internet.

After entering the order of the Jesuits, being ordained to the priesthood, and studying theology, philosophy and the sciences, Teilhard focused his academic interests mainly on palaeontology, in particular on the early history of humankind. Already his first, partly mystic publications,³¹ written while serving as a stretcher-bearer in World War I, include suggestions of a divinely-governed evolution of the cosmos. During the next 40 years of his academic and theological work, and especially during his long “exile” in China, he advanced this central idea.

In spite of his many worldly distinctions such as the nomination as *Chevalier de la Legion d’Honneur* (1947) and his membership to the

²⁸ Googling such keywords as “Teilhard,” “noosphere,” combined with “Internet” or “Cyberspace.”

²⁹ See Hickey 2005:64; Curtis 2005:164–65.

³⁰ Wolfe 2003.

³¹ E.g. “La vie cosmique” (1916) and “Mon univers” (1924).

Institut de France (1950), the Vatican prohibited the publication of Teilhard's philosophical and theological tracts — the acceptance and development of the Darwinian theory of evolution seemed to be far too progressive for the head of the Jesuit order at that time. Teilhard spent his last years, from 1952 to 1955, occupied with expeditions and lecture tours, as a research fellow at the Wenner Gren Foundation in New York.

Although Teilhard was not allowed to publish his thoughts, his ideas were well known in philosophical and scientific circles due to his numerous lectures and unremitting correspondences. Thus, in the year of his death the complete edition of his works in French, English and German was compiled by a board of prominent international scientists (such as Julian Huxley and Arnold Toynbee). Simultaneously, with the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), widespread reception of Teilhard's work began within and beyond the Catholic church — already by the late 1970s, bibliographies listed more than 10.000 titles of secondary literature on Teilhard.³²

Stimulated by Henri Bergson's attempt to synthesize the Christian idea of creation and the Darwinian evolutionism in *L'évolution créatrice* (1907), Teilhard called for a fruitful interplay of scientific findings and religious cognition.³³

According to Teilhard, mind and matter are the two dynamic conditions of the original cosmic entity. Beginning at the starting point *alpha*, god let the universe develop into a system of greater and greater complexity. In his chief work, *The Human Phenomenon* (*Le phénomène humain*, 1955), Teilhard depicts the evolutionary process as a continuous

³² For a biographic and bibliographic overview see Daecke 2000 and Trennert-Helwig 2005.

³³ Beside Bergson, the French philosopher and successor at Bergson's chair at the Collège de France, Édouard Le Roy (1870–1954), evidently played an important role for the formation of Teilhard's interpretation of evolution. Partly referring to Teilhard's early, unpublished works, Le Roy wrote already in 1928 on the *phénomène humain*, on the biosphere and the process of becoming human (*hominisation*) by the spreading of the noosphere. On the one hand, Le Roy goes back to Bergson's idea of the *élan vital*, but on the other hand he also draws on the evolutionary model of the distinguished Russian geologist Vladimir I. Vernadsky (1863–1945). See Le Roy 1928:1–57; Simon and Pitt 1999; Vernadsky 1997:21–85.

unfolding of mind, starting with the pre-stage of the emergence of the solar system and the earth (*cosmogénèse*), followed by the formation of life in the biosphere (*biogénèse*), and finally arriving at the spread of the noosphere (*noogénèsis*) with the appearance of the first hominids, who differ from their animal ancestors by their consciousness of self:

Quand, pour la première fois l'instinct s'est aperçu au miroir de lui-même, c'est le Monde tout entier qui a fait un pas... Juste aussi extensive, mais bien plus cohérente encore, nous le verrons, que toutes les nappes précédentes, c'est vraiment une nappe nouvelle, la "nappe pensante," qui, après avoir germé au Tertiaire finissant, s'étale depuis lors par-dessous le monde des Plantes et des Animaux: hors et au-dessus de la Biosphère, une *Noosphère*.³⁴

With the scientific and philosophical dominance of the West since early Christianity, according to Teilhard, the "convergence of thinking" and the "planetisation of the noosphere" began: "... grâce au prodigieux événement biologique représenté par la découverte des ondes électromagnétiques, chaque individu se trouve désormais (activement et passivement) simultanément présent à la totalité de la mer et des continents, — coextensif à la Terre."³⁵

As a result of this "collective cerebralisation," scientific advancement, fuelled by the additional impulse of the "astonishing capacities of the newest electronic automata,"³⁶ and the progress of cybernetics, as Teilhard promises, the perfecting of the human brain will be accelerated, in particular if the methods of eugenics are applied.³⁷ Teilhard understands this process of evolution as an ascension of consciousness and as a process of unification of humanity — only if all peoples and all social classes aim at the same goal, the psycho-biological development of a "mega-synthesis" of one humanity can be realized:³⁸

³⁴ Teilhard de Chardin 1955:200–2. This idea has some aspects in common with the *evolutionary humanism* concept of Julian Huxley (1887–1975), who also advocated a multi-stage model of evolution from the cosmic to the post-biological (=human) age. See Huxley 1964:9–52.

³⁵ Teilhard de Chardin 1955:266–67.

³⁶ Teilhard de Chardin 1961:118.

³⁷ See Teilhard de Chardin 1955:263–323.

³⁸ See Teilhard de Chardin 1955:270–72.

Une collectivité harmonisée des consciences, équivalente à une sorte de super-conscience. La Terre non seulement se couvrant de grains de pensée par myriades, mais s'enveloppant d'une seule enveloppe pensante, jusqu'à ne plus former fonctionnellement qu'en seul vaste Grain de Pensée, à l'échelle sidérale.³⁹

At the “end of the world,” the noosphere will finally reach its point of convergence when the totality of all individual consciousness flows together and creates a new, super-personal consciousness. This point Omega can be realized according to Teilhard only by the power of universal love. By the appearance of Jesus, humankind has been chosen to play this extraordinary role, developing the point Omega, in the history of the cosmos.

Si le monde est convergent, et si le Christ en occupe le centre, alors la Christogénèse de saint Paul et de saint Jean n'est rien autre chose, ni rien moins, que le prolongement à la fois attendu et inespéré de la Noogénèse en laquelle, pour notre expérience, culmine la Cosmogénèse. . . . Seul, absolument seul sur la Terre moderne, il [le Christianisme: O.K.] se montre capable de synthétiser dans un seul acte vital le Tout et la Personne.⁴⁰

Even in this brief summary of Teilhard's ideas, the many potential factors for the later reception of his work are visible, ranging from eugenics and Catholic theology, New Age thought and posthumanism, to the above-mentioned cyber utopia. Evidently, it is due to Marshall McLuhan that Teilhard is received so broadly, although media are widely irrelevant for Teilhard, and it is clear that his entire work is mainly focused on biological evolution in an explicitly Christian context.

Marshall McLuhan converted to Roman Catholicism in 1937, was employed at three Catholic universities,⁴¹ attended mass every day, and was in close contact with many Catholic theologians, in particular with some Jesuits. His public commentaries on religious issues were sometimes

³⁹ Teilhard de Chardin 1955:279. Although Teilhard is aware of the skepticism that people have towards his utopia, he is absolutely confident that the difficult period of the rejection will be overcome soon. See *ibid.* 266, 282–84.

⁴⁰ Teilhard de Chardin 1955:331.

⁴¹ McLuhan was employed from 1937–1944 at the Jesuit St. Louis University (Missouri), from 1944–1946 at the Assumption College (Windsor, Canada) and since 1946 at St. Michael's College (Toronto).

quite on the fringe, and characterized him as a queer fellow — e.g. he vigorously criticized the decision of the Second Vatican Council (1961–1965) to abolish Latin as the liturgical language.⁴² Hence, it is not surprising that there was a very special relation between McLuhan and Teilhard de Chardin — the crucial link in the chain is the American theologian and Jesuit Walter J. Ong (1912–2003). From 1938 to 1941, Ong studied English literature and philosophy at St. Louis University, where the young McLuhan was teaching English (1937 to 1944); McLuhan also acted as Ong's adviser for his master's thesis on the Victorian Jesuit and poet Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844–1889), whose works deeply influenced Ong's later idea of a theological connection between evolution and the revelation of god. During this time, Ong and McLuhan cultivated a friendly relationship and frequently exchanged letters — Ong even dedicated the second volume of his dissertation to "Herbert Marshall McLuhan who started all this."⁴³ While staying in Paris as a Guggenheim fellow in the early 1950s, Ong lived in the same lodgings as Teilhard de Chardin, where he was given the opportunity to study the manuscript of Teilhard's posthumously published chief work, *Le phénomène humain* (1955).

But when Ong was assigned to write a review of McLuhan's first book, *The Mechanical Bride*,⁴⁴ he took the opportunity to publish some crucial elements of Teilhard's work.⁴⁵ Following McLuhan's critique of American culture in his *Mechanical Bride*, Ong raises the question of how Catholic theology can respond in an industrial age, and then he ventures into a discussion of Teilhard's (censored) ideas. Ong introduces the concepts of the cosmosphere and the biosphere, and finally refers to the promise of the noosphere:

In a third stage, slowly, man, with human intelligence, has made his way over the surface of the earth into all its parts... with the whole world alerted simultaneously every day to goings-on in Washington, Paris, London, Rio de Janeiro, Rome and (with reservations) Moscow — human consciousness has succeeded in enveloping the entire globe in a third and still more perfect kind of sphere, the

⁴² See Eric McLuhan 1999:xxv; Marshall McLuhan 1999b.

⁴³ See Ong 1958.

⁴⁴ See Marshall McLuhan 1951.

⁴⁵ See Farrell 2003.

sphere of intelligence, the “noosphere,” as it has been styled by Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.⁴⁶

Ong became Teilhard’s most important advocate in the Anglophone world.⁴⁷ Thus, it is evident that McLuhan was familiar with Teilhard’s ideas at least from Ong’s review in 1952, even before McLuhan began his research in communication and media studies. As far as I can see, there are straight references to Teilhard only in McLuhan’s *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), probably because of outside critiques and his own increasingly sceptical attitude towards Teilhard’s work.⁴⁸

At the opening of his *Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan draws the attention of his readers to Teilhard’s work, “the lyrical testimony of a very Romantic biologist,”⁴⁹ and quotes a description of the global unification process and technological progress from *Le phénomène humain*. Immediately, McLuhan adds that Teilhard’s optimistic promises have been fiercely criticized by intellectuals, but then he also introduces Teilhard’s notion of the noosphere:

This externalisation of our senses creates what de Chardin called the “noosphere” or a technological brain for the world. Instead of tending towards a vast Alexandrian library the world has become a computer, an electronic brain, exactly as in an infantile piece of science fiction.⁵⁰

In the decisive passage where McLuhan refers to Teilhard, electronic media become the “cosmic membrane that has been snapped round the globe,”⁵¹ and two further passages in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* linking the idea of evolutionism and the progress of media technology refer to Teilhard.⁵² McLuhan’s subsequent comments on Teilhard’s work became

⁴⁶ Ong 1952:84.

⁴⁷ See, for example, Ong 1977.

⁴⁸ See Marchand 1998:216–18. Media researcher and son of Marshall McLuhan, Eric McLuhan, describes this relation even more skeptical: “I do know that my father did not find anything in Teilhard’s thought that he considered of potential use as regards his own work.” E-mail by Eric McLuhan to Oliver Krüger, 17.02.2006.

⁴⁹ Marshall McLuhan 2002:32.

⁵⁰ Marshall McLuhan 2002:32.

⁵¹ Marshall McLuhan 2002:32.

⁵² Marshall McLuhan 2002:46, 174.

more diverse, or even contradictory. Though McLuhan does not mention the French Jesuit by name in his third book, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), he does refer to Henri Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice*, and his utopia of a harmonic electronic age is guided by Bergson's idea that language is to blame for the separation of humankind:

Electricity points the way to an extension of the process of consciousness itself, on a world scale, and without any verbalization whatever. Such a state of collective awareness may have been the preverbal condition of men. Language as the technology of human extension, whose powers of division and separation we know so well, may have been the "Tower of Babel" by which men sought to scale the highest heavens. Today computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to by-pass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness, which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson. The condition of "weightlessness," that biologists say promises a physical immortality, may be paralleled by the condition of speechlessness that could confer a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace.⁵³

However, Bergson's book was also the initial point for Teilhard's ideas about a Christian interpretation of evolutionism. McLuhan is even far more enthusiastic than Bergson:

If the work of the city is the remaking or translating of man into a more suitable form than his nomadic ancestors achieved, then might not our current translation of our entire lives into the spiritual form of information seem to make of the entire globe, and of the human family, a single consciousness?⁵⁴

In other publications and interviews, McLuhan chooses a more analytical attitude, contending that he himself does not see any inherent religious significance of electronic media but "we would not belittle the merely cultural power of the non-literate and the literate forms of life to shape the perceptions and biases of the entire human community."⁵⁵

⁵³ Marshall McLuhan 1994:80.

⁵⁴ Marshall McLuhan 1994:61.

⁵⁵ Marshall McLuhan 2002:68. Also see the reception of Mircea Eliade in McLuhan's work, *ibid.* 67–71.

When he was asked outright in an interview in 1970 about the parallels of his work and Teilhard's ideas, McLuhan gave a sophisticated answer without mentioning Teilhard: he rejected all potential predictions of the future impact of media technology as mere speculation. However, he considered that the omnipresence produced by media could be an incitement for the religious seeker.⁵⁶

McLuhan's explicit critique of religious interpretations of the "electronic age," on the other hand, also reflect his admiration for the new communication technologies: "Electric information environments being utterly ethereal fosters the illusion of the world as a spiritual substance. It is now a reasonable facsimile of the mystical body, a blatant manifestation of the Anti-Christ. After all, the Prince of this World is a very great electric engineer."⁵⁷

On other occasions McLuhan disapproved of the idea of a harmonious global community,⁵⁸ referring to his concept of *retribalization* — electronic media would support individualism due to the missing hierarchies and social centres, therefore threatening the existence of community life. Indeed, by the end of the 1960s, McLuhan no longer advanced a euphoric opinion on the future impact of electronic media; rather, he declined to make any further evaluations or predictions. The *global village* — a notion inspired by Wyndham Lewis' book *America and Cosmic Man* — became his leading metaphor for the media society.⁵⁹ McLuhan's book *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968) shows that he considered this *global village* also as a place full of conflicts and crises.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Marshall McLuhan 1999c:87–88.

⁵⁷ Marshall McLuhan 1999d:70–72.

⁵⁸ He harshly criticizes the emergence of a new oral society: "Terror is the normal state of any oral society, for in it everything affects everything all the time" (Marshall McLuhan 2002:32).

⁵⁹ The well known painter and author Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957) was McLuhan's colleague at Assumption College of Windsor University. Lewis wrote in *America and Cosmic Man*: "... the earth has become one big village, with telephones laid from one end to the other, and air transport both speedy and safe..." (Lewis 1948:21).

⁶⁰ See Marshall McLuhan 1968.

McLuhan's differences with Teilhard become apparent in the use of the notion of consciousness. With the exception of a few euphoric predictions in the *Gutenberg Galaxy* and in *Understanding Media*, McLuhan understands the *extension of consciousness* as an augmented ability of individual reception and not as *one* common collective consciousness culminating finally in point Omega. The global village is a village and not a town because, metaphorically, everyone knows everything of everyone — but without necessarily sharing the views of our fellow men: "With such awareness, the subliminal life, private and social, has been hooked up into full view, with the result that we have, social consciousness' presented to us as a cause of guilt feelings. . . . In the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin."⁶¹

The Noosphere, the Global Village and Point Omega

Closer inspection of the relation between Marshall McLuhan and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin might have shown that there are indeed some significant differences in their theoretical concepts. But now, it is even more promising to investigate the concrete processes of reception of Teilhard's work in the recent interpretations of the Internet. Teilhard is no media theorist, the notions of "information" and "communication" are irrelevant in his idea of a cosmic history, and he introduces the term of the noosphere in the context of theological and philosophical considerations of the ascent of human consciousness. Yet, it is evident that McLuhan's presentation of Teilhard's ideas in the *Gutenberg Galaxy* has been authoritative for the later reception of Teilhard in popular and academic media discourse: first, Teilhard is introduced as a "romantic biologist" and in no way as a Catholic theologian in the Jesuit tradition; second, McLuhan makes no mention of the Christian context of Teilhard's evolutionary model; and third, he keeps quiet about the very the centre of Teilhard's theory, the convergence of human consciousness in the future point Omega. Thus, Teilhard's ideas appear as completely non-theological in McLuhan's works.⁶²

⁶¹ Marshall McLuhan 1994:47.

⁶² See also Boehmisch 1998.

Finally, Teilhard's notion of the noosphere is clearly reinterpreted by McLuhan. Paralleling the layer of thought which emerged with the appearance of the first hominids in Teilhard's work, McLuhan determines the noosphere as the "technological brain" — the whole world becomes a computer. In doing so, McLuhan performs three modifications that prepared the notion of the noosphere for its broad reception in cyber discourse: first, the noosphere is contextualised as a term of media technology; second, the emergence of the noosphere is dated to the beginning of the "electrical age" — our present time; and third, the noosphere implies, according to McLuhan an already existing global network.⁶³ In this manner, McLuhan supports an extraordinary appreciation of our current media developments — what was a slow process of the "planetization" of the noosphere, or a continuous convergence of thinking, becomes suddenly a higher level of evolution initialized by the spread of radio, television and computers in the "electronic age" in McLuhan's works.

For our analysis of the cultural reception of the Internet, there is in addition to the close connection of media and evolution still another important aspect to be considered. From a holistic perspective electronic media and the Internet are received as part of an unfolding organism — initially Marc Pesce referred to the idea that media are vital elements of Gaia, the earth. In this context, it is significant that McLuhan took the first step to "organise" the electronic media: apart from the basic assumption that media are an extension of our physical senses, McLuhan introduces the biological metaphors of the "electronic brain" and the "cosmic membrane," while Teilhard used the metaphor of the "thinking envelope" (*enveloppe pensante*).⁶⁴

⁶³ Teilhard separated the emergence of the noosphere thousands of years ago from the future "planetization" and "convergence of thinking." See Teilhard de Chardin 1955:211–35.

⁶⁴ This reference to biological terms is not due to a misinterpretation from French into English since the English text also uses the common notion of the *thinking envelope*. See Teilhard de Chardin 1959:251.

Gaia

The so called Gaia theory was developed in the late 1960s by the British physician, geophysicist and ecologist James E. Lovelock (born 1919). Lovelock starts with the idea that the earth, together with all its inhabitants, has to be understood as one holistic organism. With his book *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth* (1979), Lovelock greatly influenced the upcoming environmental movement as well as many holistic thinkers of various religious traditions and innovations:

The result of this more single-minded approach was the development of the hypothesis that the entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts.⁶⁵

Thus, the earth appears as a threatened planet that has to be preserved and must not be recklessly exploited. Lovelock showed that the earth as a whole reacts to the actions of its inhabitants, in particular to the increasing air pollution caused by humankind.⁶⁶ This crucial idea, that the totality of all living matter on earth constitutes one entity, has been adopted in diverse discourses.⁶⁷

Lovelock's choice of the name of the Greek goddess of the earth, Gaia, for a holistic notion of the earth facilitated the broad reception of the Gaia theory within feminist theology. The British theologian Anne Primavesi (born 1934) considers the right understanding of Gaia to be the centre of all theology in our time:

Theology at this level is an earth science. This simply affirms that the systematic organization of human knowledge, in this case knowledge of God, now includes in its remit and discussions the environment in which that knowledge is system-

⁶⁵ Lovelock 1991:9.

⁶⁶ See Lovelock 1991:12, 64–123.

⁶⁷ The ideas of Lovelock have been adopted in the context of environmentalism primarily by the Brazilian ecologist José Lutzenberger (1926–2002) who initialized the *Gaia Foundation* in 1987. See Lutzenberger 1990:101–8. Lovelock has been surprised by the religious reception of his work: “I was naïve to think that a book about Gaia would be taken as science only.” See Lovelock 2003:532.

ized.... Gaia theory shows us that... all living beings on earth are in physical contact at one remove through its water, atmosphere and soils....⁶⁸

Beside explicitly Christian theologians, prominent New Age thinkers such as Ken Wilber (born 1949)⁶⁹ and Fritjof Capra (born 1939)⁷⁰ adopted elements of the Gaia theory and reconnected them once again with Teilhard's teleological interpretation of evolution.⁷¹ On the other hand Lovelock's approach is often linked in the American context to the more rational work of the philosopher and architect Buckminster Fuller (1895–1983), who was very popular in his time.⁷² The current heterogeneous Gaia movement unifies the ideas of well-known thinkers like Teilhard and Lovelock, with diverse ideas and practices from ecology, astrology, Buddhism, Hopi-Indian culture, and neo-shamanism.⁷³

The recent reception of the Gaia theory in the discourse about electronic media is mainly due to decisive efforts by James Lovelock himself, aided by McLuhan's advocated relation between evolution and media. The ecologist is deeply convinced that progress of sciences and

⁶⁸ Primavesi 2000:20. Even more significantly than Primavesi, the Catholic theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (born 1936) enforces a political perspective of eco-feminism, aiming at a balance of the "male God" and the "female Gaia." See Ruether 1992:254–74.

⁶⁹ In his "integral theory," Wilber refers to many elements of Gaia theory as well as to Teilhard's ideas. The notion of biosphere, noosphere and point Omega are essential for his theory, though not in a Christian sense but in the sense of an evolutionary teleology. See Wilber 1995:85–87, 111–13.

⁷⁰ Capra — as well as other New Age thinkers — combines ecological approaches of the Gaia-Theory with evolutionism and the vision of a spiritual renewal of a unified humanity. See Capra 1982:284–85.

⁷¹ According to Marilyn Ferguson, author of the influential New Age book *The Aquarian Conspiracy* (1980), Teilhard de Chardin is actually the most frequently quoted author among New Age believers. See Ferguson 1980:50–51, 93, 420.

⁷² In the 1930s, Fuller proposed a rational vision of a world community that is able to live in accordance with aesthetics and nature on the "spaceship earth" because of scientific-technological progress. See Fuller 1938:356–60; Fuller and Dil 1983:11–17.

⁷³ See <http://www.gaiamind.org>; <http://www.gaia-net.de>. Judith L. Boice depicts her experiences in *Gaian Communities* very colorfully. See Boice 1990. A linguistic analysis of the reception of Gaia seems to be a promising undertaking — the term is used as a name for a Neo-Hindu healer in Munich as well as for a label for rechargeable batteries.

of cybernetics in particular, as part of the natural evolution of human-kind, will also lead to a better understanding of Gaia — as long as human beings are still in touch with nature.⁷⁴ Although he is concerned with national resistances, Lovelock shares with Teilhard an optimistic outlook of future life on our planet, since the earth is now conscious of its own existence: “Still more important is the implication that the evolution of the homo sapiens, with his technological inventiveness and his increasingly subtle communication network, has vastly increased Gaia’s range of perception. She is now through us awake and aware of herself.”⁷⁵ Referring to the analogy of biological brains and networked computers, Lovelock anticipates the later cyber theories: “Our brains can be likened to medium-size computers which are directly linked to one another and to memory banks, as well as to an almost unlimited array of sensors, peripheral devices, and other machines.”⁷⁶

As demonstrated in our considerations so far, the reception of Teilhard de Chardin in the context of the Internet is obviously a complex, non-linear process which is mainly based, on the one hand, on McLuhan’s notion of media and evolution, and on the other hand on Lovelock’s organic interpretation of media as a part of Gaia. Teilhard is presented in the figure of an unrecognized prophet; in Mark Pesce’s book he appears as a modern and prescient theorist of evolutionism;⁷⁷ Jennifer Cobb depicts him as an “obscure Jesuit priest and paleontologist.”⁷⁸ Pesce completely hides Teilhard’s theological background and connects the concept of the noosphere with Gaia and the Internet; Cobb outlines a spiritual vision of cyberspace exceeding the limits of mere Christian theology, and avoids any references to Teilhard’s christology. The point Omega as the convergence of human thought is only adopted by the posthumanist thinker Frank Tipler.

Further, the concept of the noosphere in McLuhan’s sense is adopted by today’s cyber-theorists, but there is an important shift: the emergence of the noosphere is no longer linked to the dim notion of the “electronic age” but concretely to the spread of the Internet. In this

⁷⁴ Lovelock 1991:127–40.

⁷⁵ Lovelock 1991:148.

⁷⁶ Lovelock 1991:150.

⁷⁷ Pesce 2000:164–71.

⁷⁸ Cobb 1995.

manner, an extraordinary significance is attributed to the Internet as the decisive step of evolution. Additionally, the construed relation between a religious, or spiritual, teleology (Pesce) and the idea of a continuous revelation of god through the Internet (Cobb) and through computer technology in general terms (Tipler) — so the chain of Gaia, god and the Internet — bestows upon new media an absolutely singular significance in the context of the earthly and even of the cosmic evolution of life.⁷⁹

Contexts

The reception of the idea of the noosphere and Gaia theory is not a phenomenon to be clinically dissected, settled in a “cultural vacuum,” but it is a process embedded in a field of receptive conditions. These dominant patterns of reception may influence the concrete cognition of certain phenomena, and sometimes they illuminate the intercultural differences of the reception of similar ideas — consequently, the close connection of the revelation of god with modern media technology as an aspect of evolution initially emerges as an a mere American idea. A certain complex of ideas in American and European philosophy plays a significant role for the cultural reception of the Internet, which shall be surveyed below. In this context the prevailing pattern of reception is the idea of the advancement of life forms along the history of evolution, which is legitimized as partly religious or metaphysical, or as merely materialistic.

The American historian Arthur Oncken Lovejoy (1873–1962) shed light on the initial cultural reception of modern evolutionism in his splendid *William James Lectures* at Harvard in 1932–33. In his comprehensive work, which begins with Plato and Aristotle, he deals with a crucial philosophical and religious idea of the occident: *the great chain of being*. For many centuries the idea of the connectivity of all beings was underlying the philosophical and theological discourse on the position of humankind as part of the cosmic creation; it has been advocated by numerous thinkers, such as John Locke, Alexander Pope,

⁷⁹ Of course, in this discursive strategy the agents and “prophets” of the Internet are supposed to be important, too.

Edmund Law, Leibniz, Kant, Herder, and Diderot in modern times. This chain is defined by the distance to god as the origin of all creatures, and the ranking starts with the lowest organisms and the animals, then human beings and angels, and ends up in god. In the 18th century, the English author Soame Jenyns (1704–1787) translated this hierarchy into the order of the human races, and he contrasts the genius of the West, Isaac Newton, with the “wild nature of the Hottentot.” Initially, this chain was assumed to be static, consisting of the perfect and complete hierarchy of all beings as god created them in the beginning of the world, and as they will continue to exist until the end of the world.⁸⁰

It was the Swiss natural philosopher Charles Bonnet (1720–1793) who named the idea of the Dutch scientist Jan Swammerdam (1637–1680) that all life has developed from a germ, in which future development is already implicit as *evolution* — as unfolding and uncoiling of an already existing structure. Arthur McCalla considers this as evidence that the terminological basis of later evolutionism has its roots in the Christian idea of advancement: “Evolution is here a synonym for the preformationist archetypal pattern of essence and development that purports to be at once scientific and soterological.”⁸¹ Bonnet, as well as the Swabian pietist and natural philosopher Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), advocated in the context of this biological preformationism the idea of an increase of biological complexity and spiritual capacity of creatures, with god realising himself in the history of evolution as *ens manifestativum sui*, according to Oetinger. Evolution is seen as the augmentation of divine corporeality. In the 18th century, the idea of the *great chain of being* is completely temporalized, the hierarchy of creatures becomes dynamic. It is now a hierarchy that asks for a genealogical ascension because all potentials of being in the universe will seek their realisation, and this can happen only in a temporal progression.⁸²

Though the thesis of continuous perfection of natural creation had already been expressed by Erasmus Darwin (1731–1802) and Jean-

⁸⁰ See Lovejoy 1961:183–200.

⁸¹ McCalla 1998:30.

⁸² See Lovejoy 1961:242–87; McCalla 1998:29–31. Evidently, Tipler receives Lovejoy’s work. See Tipler 1994:216, 385.

Baptiste Lamarck (1744–1829),⁸³ it was not until Charles Darwin (1809–1882) that a theory of evolution was drafted on an empirical basis. Principally, Darwin rejected all teleological implications of the history of evolution, but his notion of the emergence of higher and more and more advanced and perfect creatures⁸⁴ in the closing words of his chief work *On the Origin of Species* (1859), and in some private letters, has provided a basis for all teleological interpretations of evolution.⁸⁵ In spite of some opposition towards this teleology⁸⁶ the idea of a continuous advancement of life was widespread in rational and scientific discourses,⁸⁷ as well as in religious discourses. Despite the frequently and strikingly quoted fundamentalist resistance against Darwinism, there were a large number of Protestant theologians and philosophers who were committed to bringing evolutionism in accordance with the Christian salvific history.⁸⁸ The temporalization of the *great chain of being* and the acceptance of inner-worldly progress in the context of postmillennialism evidently form the background of the modern reception of evolutionism.

⁸³ See Lovejoy 1961:227–41; Spadafora 1990:234; Staudinger 1986:167–68.

⁸⁴ Darwin's closing words give an optimistic outlook: "And as Natural Selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection" (Darwin 1988:347).

⁸⁵ See Benz 1965:81–91, 148–50; Baillie 1950:145–47.

⁸⁶ Most prominently Heinrich Rickert, Julian Huxley and Richard Dawkins opposed a teleological interpretation of evolution.

⁸⁷ Most important among these popularizations of Darwinism are the works of the German zoologist and natural philosopher Ernst Haeckel (1834–1919), *Die natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* (1868), *Welträthsel* (1899) which have been largely distributed in all major Western languages.

⁸⁸ Most notably among these theologians are the conservative Biblicist Minot Judson Savage (1841–1918), who considered the problem of theodicy as a kind of *maladjustment* that will be cured in the future evolutionary process, and the Scottish Presbyterian and later Princeton philosopher James McCosh (1811–1894), who opposed an atheistic interpretation in his book *The Religious Aspect of Evolution*. Also, the Christian scientist Henry Drummond (1851–1897) has been very influential with his Lowell Lectures, titled *The Ascent of Man* (1894). Further protagonists in this debate are the Calvinistic botanist Asa Gray (1808–1888) with his *Darwiniana* (1876) and the geologist and preacher George Frederick Wright (1838–1921). See Benz 1965:157–83. Apart from these Christian interpretations, the English scientist Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) advocated the spiritist idea that the future human being will transcend its corporeality and live as disembodied spirit; see Wallace 1987:291–320.

Notwithstanding the significance of these theological interpretations, it is evident that the works of the three philosophers Henri Bergson (1859–1941), Samuel Alexander (1859–1938) and Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) are of greater importance for Teilhard and the later reception of the noosphere in the media context.

As a thinker in the tradition of the philosophy of life, Bergson opposes a rational-positivistic interpretation of evolution in his chief work *L'évolution créatrice* (1907). The development of life forms cannot be simply reduced to mechanistic laws of action, which always produce the same results under the same conditions. Evolution is much more creative — thus, Bergson disapproves of teleological interpretations as well as mechanistic reductions.⁸⁹ In fact, the development of life forms is driven by a metaphysical spirit of life, a power of life — the *élan vital* — which is inherent in every creature:

Nous revenons ainsi, par un long détour, à l'idée d'où nous étions partis, celle d'un *élan originel* de la vie, passant d'une génération de germes à la génération suivante de germes par l'intermédiaire des organismes développés qui forment entre les germes le trait d'union. Cet élan, se conservant sur les lignes d'évolution entre lesquelles il se partage, est la cause profonde des variations, du moins de celles qui se transmettent régulièrement, qui s'additionnent, qui créent des espèces nouvelles.⁹⁰

This *élan vital* constitutes, according to Bergson, the metaphysical unity of life that generates new forms of life over and over, by the struggle of mind and matter.⁹¹

Samuel Alexander regards Darwinism, in his book *Space, Time and Deity* (1920), as a mere scientific theory which avoids any evaluations of its object of investigation, but which delivers an essential explanation of how values are formed in human culture and, even more generally, in the history of life. Those creatures which have survived by natural selection or mutation under certain conditions are considered to be good so that the most survivable beings are worshipped as the top of

⁸⁹ See Bergson 1909:57–73, 392–99.

⁹⁰ Bergson 1909:95.

⁹¹ See Bergson 1909:95–106.

the hierarchy.⁹² From a human point of view, the universe bears continuously higher *levels of existence* — matter, life, and mind:

Within the all-embracing stuff of Space-Time, the universe exhibits an emergence in Time of successive levels of finite existences, each with its characteristic empirical quality. The highest of these empirical qualities known to us is mind or consciousness. Deity is the next higher empirical quality to the highest we know...⁹³

The highest level of existence which can be experienced by human beings, *mind* or *consciousness*, provides a stepping stone to the next level of cosmic evolvment: “Deity is thus the next higher empirical quality to mind, which the universe is engaged in bringing to birth.”⁹⁴ Alexander assumes that there is no divine plan for evolution, but the *deity* is a part of the evolutionary process: “Deity is some quality not realised but in process of realisation, is future and not present.”⁹⁵ For Alexander, god is an endless being within the space-time which is developing along with the history of the universe, and embodies all qualities of the universe which are not yet realized or cognizable:⁹⁶ “As actual, God does not possess the quality of deity but is the universe as tending to that quality. This *nisus* in the universe, though not present to our sense, is yet present to reflection upon experience.”⁹⁷ Thus, the development of the universe driven by the *nisus* does not imply determinism but a strong teleological moment, since new and surviving beings in the history of evolution are always determined as superior.⁹⁸

It remains controversial to what extent the works of Alexander have influenced the ideas of the mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. Whitehead also endeavoured to understand the phenomena of the empirical world in accordance with the history of nature and cosmos, and to overcome the boundaries between sciences,

⁹² See Alexander 1966:309–10.

⁹³ Alexander 1966:345.

⁹⁴ Alexander 1966:347.

⁹⁵ Alexander 1966:379.

⁹⁶ See Alexander 1966:341–72.

⁹⁷ Alexander 1966:361.

⁹⁸ See Baillie 1950:146–152; Emmert 1991:109–12.

humanities and philosophy. Basically, Whitehead drafts the image of a bipolar god who is characterized by a *primordial* and a *consequent* nature. Both natures of god strive to come together to re-establish the unity of god. He concludes that this dynamic god, in process of realizing his actuality, creates continuously new and higher forms of existence.⁹⁹

There are thus four creative phases in which the universe accomplishes its actuality. There is first the phase of conceptual origination, deficient in actuality, but infinite in its adjustment of valuation. Secondly, there is the temporal phase of physical origination, with its multiplicity of actualities. In this phase full actuality is attained; but there is deficiency in the solidarity of individuals with each other. . . . Thirdly, there is the phase of perfected actuality, in which the many are one everlastingly, without the qualification of any loss either of individual identity or of completeness of unity. In everlastingness, immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality. . . . In the fourth phase, the creative action completes itself. . . . For the kingdom of heaven is with us today. The action of the fourth phase is the love of God for the world.¹⁰⁰

This idea of a continuously evolving god had great influence on the formation of the Protestant process theology which began in the 1930s at the Chicago Divinity School.¹⁰¹

Bergson, Alexander and Whitehead, and later Teilhard, created systems of cosmological and evolutionary metaphysics as an extended interpretation of the empirical world depicted by the sciences. These briefly summarized ideas of Bergson, Alexander and Whitehead represent the dominant structure of the religious and philosophical reception of evolutionism in the first half of the 20th century, reconciling the temporalized notion of the *great chain of being* with modern evolutionism. Figuratively, this is the “farmland” on which the ideas of Teilhard de Chardin, Marshall McLuhan, some New Age thinkers, and today’s cyber philosophers have flourished, as far as they are concerned with the question of evolution. McLuhan, Tipler, and Cobb explicitly refer to Bergson or Whitehead, and Cobb and Tipler even consider their own approach as a continuation of process theology or natural theol-

⁹⁹ See Whitehead 1929:511–44.

¹⁰⁰ Whitehead 1929:532–33.

¹⁰¹ See Maaßen 1991:217–19.

ogy, whereas Pesce presumably receives the ideas of Teilhard more in the context of New Age philosophy. In spite of their differences in appropriating the notion of the noosphere, Pesce, Cobb and Tipler all find the emergence of the Internet and computer technology in our present time to be a sign of a new level of consciousness in the history of evolution that unifies humankind.

Enlightenment, the Study of Religion and the Utopia of Community

The emergence of the Internet in the 1990s has not been the first occurrence when people attributed community ideals to new communication technology. In his outstanding article “The Rise and Persistence of the Technological Community Ideal,” Randy Connolly analyzes the history of technological innovations, demonstrating how the great channel constructions of the 17th and 18th centuries were regarded as a promising means for unifying all peoples and for banishing war and hostility. Later, the telegraph, railway, radio and television — so, the “magic channels” of Marshall McLuhan — were considered means of overcoming social disparity and hierarchies, and thereby supporting the perception of the true equality of all men.¹⁰² Here, the pattern of utopian interpretations is determined by a crucial project of the enlightenment: the equality and community of all human beings. Thence, the religious reception of the Internet corresponds with secular interpretations such as the visions of the French media philosopher Pierre Lévy.¹⁰³ In his view, cyberspace is the metaphor of liberated and equal humanity realizing the prospects of enlightenment as a global collective intelligence.¹⁰⁴

Now, it is remarkable that the secular utopia of cyberspace adopts the same impulses that were the significant driving forces of the comparative study of religion in the 19th century. Initially, under the formative

¹⁰² Connolly 2001.

¹⁰³ The postmodern media philosopher Pierre Lévy (born 1956) is a professor at the Département Hypermédia de l'Université Paris St. Denis and he is deeply influenced by his mentor Felix Guattari.

¹⁰⁴ See Lévy 2001:100.

influence of philology, the comparison of languages were thought to suffice to illuminate the early history of peoples and finally reveal their common cultural origin. Here, Friedrich Schlegel's treatise *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808) has been seminal. When, in the second half of 19th century the linguist Friedrich Max Müller (1821–1900) initiated the comparative study of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*), he regarded the new discipline as the completion of all history. The exploration of the cultural origin of men is, according to Müller, equal to the religious origin of men, and consequently the nature of religion would also reveal the nature of men.¹⁰⁵

But more surprising than the continuity in the growth of language is the continuity in the growth of religion. Of religion, too, as of language, it may be said that in it everything new is old, and everything old is new, and that there has been no entirely new religion since the beginning of the world.¹⁰⁶

For Müller, the book remained the dominant media paradigm of his time underlying the processes of cognition. The translation and comparison of the “holy scriptures” of humanity promised to uncover the core of all living and past religions. In doing so, Müller received the old, initially theological idea of the accumulation of knowledge (on god) which began with Vincent of Lérin's *Commonitorium* (ca. 434), continued in Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1605), and influenced the succeeding doctrines of scientific and religious progress (Newton, Condorcet, Priestley). But Müller thought globally, considering the scriptures of religions as a divinely given network, of which only the total view will disclose the significance of its single elements.¹⁰⁷ It is not necessary, here, to explain the reception and continuation of this idea in the Parliament of the World's Religions (1893), the *Religiösen Menschheitsbund* initialized by Rudolf Otto, the works of Mircea Eliade, and many others.¹⁰⁸

In fact, concerning the question of the cultural and religious reception of the Internet, it is of great interest that this medium is received as a secular idea as well as a religious utopia of universal community.

¹⁰⁵ See Gladigow 2005b:44–46.

¹⁰⁶ Müller 2002:70.

¹⁰⁷ See Müller 2002:70–79.

¹⁰⁸ See Lüddeckens 2002; Obergethmann 1998.

Pierre Lévy's conviction that the Internet will develop into a collective intelligence by the advancement of knowledge and reason converges with the religious notions of the noosphere proposed by Jennifer Cobb, Mark Pesce and others. The emergence of the Internet is considered to be the outstanding event in the history of evolution, indicating humanity's course from its divine (or however transcendent) origin to a Christian or more commonly spiritual community of the world. The contextualisation of this religious idea, founded in both Enlightenment and Christian thought, may raise the question whether (and in which way) there might be a religious reception of the Internet in other cultural hemispheres such as Japan, India or China.

According to the communication scientist Armand Mattelart, these post-modern utopias of an egalitarian *global village* have crucial implications for the construction of sense in our contingent societies overflowing with an unmanageable amount of information. They provide the illusion of a rural (*village*) or organic (*Gaia*) — religious or secular — global community, and they oppose the experienced loss of actual communities.¹⁰⁹ The metaphors of Gaia, god and the Internet reflect some aspects of the current community ideal. To regard the Internet as the (most important) result of the evolutionary process exceeds the previous euphemisms welcoming new technologies in the past. The medium now becomes a part of a superior cosmic process, apparently unfettered by human influences. In an age that lacks one common myth, the medium itself becomes the master narrative — *die Meistererzählung* — of the media society. However, a consideration of the history of the cultural reception of technological innovations, and the simple realisation that probably two thirds of the world's population never used a telephone,¹¹⁰ may enable us to keep the necessary analytical distance in the study of religion and media.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ See Mattelart 1996:85–162, 304.

¹¹⁰ In his report, the UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan, refers to the metaphor of the global village but he clarifies that most “villagers” never made a phone call and have to fight with mere existential challenges (such as clear water, food, health care, education). See Annan 2000:16.

¹¹¹ The media scientist Lynn Schofield Clark for example paradigmatically considered the phenomenon of religion on the Internet as *protestantization* since on the Internet the original protestant values like liberty, pluralism and democracy could now be realized. See Schofield Clark 2002:7; similar is Helland 2005:13.

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Hermetic Histories: Divine Providence and Conspiracy Theory

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Abstract

In the ancient world, the writing of history was closely connected with divination. In this essay I argue that two types of historiography, the providential and the conspiratorial, have a distinct divinatory dimension. Divination purports to uncover occult influences behind the gritty flux of human affairs. Providentialism looks for the “hand of God” in historical events both great and small. Conspiracism is concerned not with the “hand of God” but the “hidden hand.” Providentialism and conspiracism are hermetic histories. Like divination they concern themselves with tracking and interpreting signs. History is deciphered via sacred/secret texts, such as the Bible or *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In this mode historiography is akin to cryptography. Providentialism and conspiracism are hermetic also in the sense that they present “airtight,” all-encompassing explanations of past events. They are totalizing histories. The purpose of this essay is to highlight connections between the discourses of divination, divine providence, and conspiracy theory. By way of illustration, I discuss the *Primary Chronicle* of Kievan Rus’ and two articles written in the post-Soviet period by the late Metropolitan Ioann. The approach taken in this essay foreshortens textual detail and historical depth in favor of a kind of Wittgensteinian perspicuous presentation. Hence the value of formal links: the vaulting phrases of providentialism resound in the *Primary Chronicle*, yet the text seems grounded in the *Lebenswelt* of divination; in the articles of Ioann, providentialism passes into conspiracism, demonstrating a link between the two hermetic discourses.

Keywords

divination, historiography, providence, conspiracy theory, Russia

*[Historians are] seers upon the watch towers,
gazing with serene eye upon the moral firmament,
reading the aspect of the lights and shadows
which alternate in the moral heavens,
solving the problems, interpreting the prophecies,
and opening the parables which are written in the
history of man, which are uttered by the experience
of society.*

(Quoted in Nye 1966:1).

In the ancient riverine civilizations, historiography was intertwined with the mantic arts. According to J.J. Finkelstein, "...omen texts, and the historical information imbedded in them, lie at the very root of all Mesopotamian historiography" (1963:463). Archaic Chinese historiography originated in scapulimantic divination. Records of prognostications inscribed on oracle bones constituted a "primitive form of legitimating historiography" (Keightley 1988:373). As Léon Vandermeersch (1992:1–2) explains,

Puisque tous les actes importants de la vie sociale, tous les événements conjecturables propres à affecter celle-ci, faisaient l'objet de divinations, le simple recueil des notations oraculaires a pu tout naturellement faire incidemment fonction de livre-journal des affaires du pays, devenant ainsi prototype des annales. C'est ce qui explique que la fonction d'annaliste, d'historiographe, se soit longtemps confondue avec celle de scribe des divinations, et que le nom de cette fonction soit devenu, beaucoup plus tard, le nom de l'*histoire* elle-même: *shi*.

The beginnings of ancient Roman historical writing are perhaps to be found in the *Annales maximi*, a divinatory record of prodigies and their expiations (Hartog 2000:388). In the ancient world, historians were "seers upon the watch towers..." François Hartog puts it this way: "...the *two disciplines*, divination and historiography, seem to have shared or inhabited (peacefully enough) the same intellectual space. Surely, they could be and were practiced by the same intellectuals" (387).

In this essay I want to propose that two kinds of historical writing, the providential and the conspiratorial, have a divinatory quality. Divination purports to uncover occult influences behind the gritty flux of human affairs. Providentialism seeks the "hand of God" in historical events both great and small. Conspiracism in turn represents an

“inverted providentiality” (Jameson 1992:1), revealing — and reveling in — not the “hand of God” but the “hidden hand.”

Providentialism and conspiracism are both hermetic disciplines. Like divination, they traffic in recondite signs — secrets, clues — calling for interpretation. They picture the world as a great “semiological system” (Winship 1996:15), “a quasi-religious world view dominated by an order of similarities and analogies” (Boym 1999:98). What Averil Cameron says about Christian providentialism pertains to conspiracy theories: “History becomes a matter of revelation through signs, and signs the mechanism of history” (1991:211). Historiography in this mode is akin to cryptography.

Providentialism and conspiracism are hermetic also in the sense of comprising “airtight,” all-encompassing systems of thought. As Weber (1964:143–44) realized, the belief in divine providence is the maximal rationalization of magical divination, explaining every event in terms of a single transcendent agent. Conspiracism trumps even providentialism in its explanatory reach, for it is ultimately impervious to any kind of counter evidence. Brian Keeley observes that, “conspiracy theories are the only theories for which evidence *against* them is actually construed as evidence *in favor* of them” (1999:120).

The purpose of this essay is to draw out these and other connections and relationships between divination, providentialism, and conspiracism. For tangible examples I turn to several texts composed a millennium apart: the *Primary Chronicle* of Kievan Rus’ and two articles written in the post-Soviet period by the late Metropolitan Ioann. My approach is informed by Gabrielle Spiegel’s idea of the “social logic of the text,” which she explains is

a term and a concept that seeks to combine in a single but complex framework a protocol for the analysis of a text’s social site — its location within an embedded social environment of which it is a product and in which it acts as an agent — and its own discursive character as “logos,” that is, as itself a literary artifact composed of language and thus demanding literary (formal) analysis. (1997:xviii).

The *Primary Chronicle* must be viewed in terms of the social situation of Kievan Rus’, a newly Christianized agro-literate polity, and its clerical authors, Orthodox monks from the celebrated Caves Monastery. A discussion of its “logos” should make reference to the chronicle’s complex compositional structure as well as its intertextual relationships

with a constellation of Byzantino-Slavonic texts. Ioann's articles need to be situated in relation to the tumult of a collapsed empire, the revanchist and anti-Semitic discourses of the Russian right, the media market in post-Soviet society, Ioann's literary output and ecclesiastical career (he was also an Orthodox monk), and so forth.

The approach taken here purposely foreshortens this protocol in favor of comparison, pulling certain features forward, leaving others in the background, displaying gradations of similarity and difference. Comparison, as Jonathan Z. Smith has emphasized, is always aspectual and adventitious. But what this approach loses in historical depth and textual detail, I hope it gains in clarifying perspective, bringing a cluster of previously unremarked relationships into focus. The method owes something to Wittgenstein's *Remarks on Frazer's Golden Bough* (Wittgenstein 1979:8–9), as highlighted by Smith (2004:61–79; cf. Clack 1999:53–78, Ginzburg 2004), insofar as it endeavors to lay out the material “so that we can easily pass from one part to another and have a clear view of it — showing it in a ‘perspicuous’ [*übersichtlichen*] way.” According to Wittgenstein, “The perspicuous presentation makes possible that understanding which consists just in the fact that we ‘see the connections’. Hence the importance of finding *intermediate links*.”

The texts in question afford us a glimpse of such links. The vaulting cadence of providentialism resounds in the *Primary Chronicle* — “An angel does no harm to man, but instead, thinks constantly of his good” (*sub anno* 1015), “God in his wrath causes foreigners to attack a nation, and then, when its inhabitants are thus crushed by the invaders, they remember God” (*sub anno* 1068) (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953) — yet the text seems grounded in the *Lebenswelt* of divination, as the monastic chroniclers record and puzzle out the meaning of omens bearing on Rus'. Their practice is a kind of “providential divination” (cf. Winship 1999:15). One benefit of seeing things in this light is that it can broaden our understanding of what counts as divination. Arguing for the religious dimension of ancient Roman literature as it engages in a dialogue with primary religious traditions, Denis Feeney (1998:42) makes the following point:

The fact that this dialogue may not be taking place in a ritual or performative context does not derogate from the cultural work it is doing. An analogy from the Mass of our modern musical tradition may be helpful. From Bach's B Minor Mass onwards, the musical Mass is not necessarily liturgical or sacramental, by virtue of

its length, alternative musical structures, and recapitulation of earlier portions of the liturgy out of order. Despite these liturgical licenses, which make them incompatible with church performance, the Masses are still “religious” in some worthwhile sense of the word.

Without wanting to push the analogy too far, I hope to show that, although the providentialism of Christian historians constitutes a kind of scriptorial as opposed to ritual divination, it can nevertheless be called “divinatory” in a worthwhile sense of that word. All those bulky medieval Christian chronicles on sagging library shelves constitute a legitimate (and largely unfamiliar) body of data for the study of divination.

Ioann’s texts have a divinatory quality to them as well, as I hope to show, but they also demonstrate a passage from providentialism to conspiracism. He speaks in the language of divine providence, but easily moves into conspiratorial harangues about ominous plots hatched by secret cartels. Seeing this may tell us something important about the nature of conspiracy theories. Ours is an age of perfervid conspiracism, yet the topic has not yet received the attention it deserves from students of religion. Conspiracy theories *about* religion flourish, as the phenomenal success of *The Da Vinci Code* demonstrates. This paper argues that conspiracism is in certain respects *like* religion. Conspiracy theories, suggests Timothy Melley, “require a form of quasi-religious conviction, a sense that the conspiracy in question is an entity with almost supernatural powers” (1999:8). According to Brian Keeley (1999:123),

Conspiracy theorists are, I submit, some of the last believers in an ordered universe. By supposing that current events are under the control of nefarious agents, conspiracy theories entail that such events are *capable of being controlled*. In an earlier time, it would have been natural to believe in an ordered world, in which God and other supernatural agents exercised significant influence and control.

Conspiracy theories may be usefully viewed in relation to providentialism and other “occult cosmologies,” that is, “systems of belief in a world animated by secret, mysterious, and/or unseen powers. Occult cosmologies suggest that there is more to what happens in the world than meets the eye. . . .” West and Sanders also raise the question of whether such cosmologies “potentially contain within them theories of conspiracy” (2003:6–7). Ioann’s articles offer a suggestive linkage. Yet, again to follow Wittgenstein (1979:9),

in our case an hypothetical link is not meant to do anything except draw attention to the similarity, the connection, between the *facts*. As one might illustrate the internal relation of a circle to an ellipse by gradually transforming an ellipse into a circle; *but not in order to assert that a given ellipse in fact, historically, came from a circle* (hypothesis of development) but only to sharpen our eye for a formal connection.

My focus will be on the formal relationship between the circle of providentialism and the ellipse of conspiracism, leaving it to those more qualified to work out the hypothesis of development.

In the remainder of this introductory section, I delineate a model of text-based divination. The next two sections treat the *Primary Chronicle* and Ioann's articles as examples of providential and conspiratorial historiography respectively. I conclude with some comparative reflections and pose questions requiring further study.

Divination is a problem-solving discourse. People resort to it when they are faced with a crisis or worrisome situation, pending or past. In such cases divination provides answers, certainty, reassurance. It does so by offering a special kind of knowledge or insight. Divination purports to go beyond mundane appearances to the hidden structure or significance of events. It entails the discovery and disclosure of spiritual forces or occult realities operative in human affairs. Cicero (*De divinatione* 1.1.1.) famously defined divination as "the foresight and knowledge of future events," but that is overly restrictive. Seen in cross-cultural perspective, divination has as much to do with the past as with the future.

According to Cicero (*De divinatione* 1.5.2), there are two kinds of divination: the first depends on art, the other on nature. "Artificial" divination involves human skill and ingenuity in the reading of signs. Our interest will be with a form of artificial, retrospective, text-based divination. This typically involves the following ensemble of elements: a problematic situation arises (e.g., an illness, an eclipse, a famine); a client consults a diviner; the diviner has recourse to a specialized *instrumentarium* (a textual "toolkit"); working with this *instrumentarium*, an interpretation is constructed which "fits" the situation; the hidden significance or causation of the problem is revealed; and a plan of action is enjoined on the client. According to David Zeitlyn, in such systems,

The results of divination are believed to lie in a particular text (which is typically arcane and erudite). The text is selected by a series of operations which themselves

may be random, inspired, or to some degree consciously manipulated. Once selected, the text must be interpreted or otherwise shown to be relevant to the current issue. (2001:225)

Critical here is the notion of *relevance*. The diviner must somehow make the text “fit” the situation of the client; he must provide a “plausibility structure” which explains — and therefore relieves — the client’s distress (cf. Smith 1982:49–52). The interpretation must match the situation at hand. Providing this “plausibility structure” is always a rhetorical endeavor. The diviner must persuade his client that he is able to elucidate the problem, that his interpretation is pertinent and satisfactory. Ingenuity is required. Divination cannot be understood simply as the mechanical application of *dogmata* to particular circumstances. The diviner’s authority is not a given; it must be created (Akinaso 1995:254–55). This is so in part because divination takes place in a competitive atmosphere. For one thing, as Zeitlyn (1999:237) points out, other diviners may well be familiar with the same texts and this puts pressure on the diviner to prove that his reading is the correct one. Their divinations may also compete with alternative explanatory systems, such as secular medicine or comprehensive theodicies like karma (e.g., Nuckolls 1992).

We see this text-based discipline in the ancient Roman form of divination based on the enigmatic *Libri Sibyllini*. When an unusual or disturbing event occurred, such as a plague, foreign invasion, or prodigy (e.g., the birth of a hermaphrodite), it was interpreted as a sign of divine displeasure, a breakdown in the *pax deorum*. In response to the crisis, the keepers of the book were instructed by the senate to consult the *Libri Sibyllini* in order to determine its meaning and chart a course of action (Parke 1992:136–51; 190–215). The senate in turn might order the performance of a particular rite or the establishment of a new religious institution. Unfortunately, we do not know much more than this, because the *Libri* themselves are lost and the scribe-diviners left no records of the interpretive process.

The ensemble comes into view more clearly in the cache of letters-produced by scribe-diviners for the Neo-Assyrian kings (Parpola 1970–1983). First, an anomaly or portent would be observed and reported to one of the royal scribes. The scribe would then consult the canonical omen compendia in order to find material which would help decode

its meaning. When the portent had been deciphered, the scribe would compose a letter or report to the king that contained a record of the portent's occurrence, the interpretation of the portent, and any other relevant information, such as the need for an apotropaic rite. The letters had to demonstrate a "fit" between the texts and the happening. To that end they included "quotations culled from the traditional omen collections... pertinent to these events. As a rule, a string of such omen quotations is given, each corresponding to a special feature of the event such as timing, accompanying circumstances, etc." (Oppenheim 1969:98; cf. Rochberg 2004).

There are obviously important differences between these cases. For one thing, in the Roman case signs and omens have a diagnostic significance, whereas in the Neo-Assyrian case they have a predictive value. But in both situations we are dealing with what may be termed "public" divination. The concern is with phenomena which had a bearing on the welfare of the state, which seemed to put the realm in danger. Furthermore, the phenomena were interpreted by authorized scribal experts on behalf of the political leaders. The Roman senate was directly involved in the Sibylline consultations; the Neo-Assyrian letters were composed for the king. This is not divination carried out for private reasons, for the determination of success in love or business.

It is my contention that we see a similar pattern — now more, now less — in the genres of providential and conspiratorial historiography. I turn now to texts which illustrate this connection.

Providential Historiography

Providentialism is a historical discourse. Derived from Classical and Biblical sources, the Christian discourse of divine providence posits one deity who creates and governs the universe and all within it. History is the outward expression, the working out, of God's divine providence. Wars, revolutions, the rise and fall of kingdoms and dynasties — all are directed by the "hand of God" (Meyer and Mayer 1973). According to Averil Cameron (1993:121), in the formative period of late antiquity,

... the idea of Christian providence constituted a totalising explanation, a kind of theory of everything. It embraced the idea of a divine plan which began with

Creation, progressed through the Incarnation and culminated with the Second Coming and the Day of Judgement, and in which all history was subsumed.

Thus, the discourse of divine providence offers a sweeping view from cosmos to history.

Peter Hodgson (1989:11) offers this précis of the “classic model” of Christian providential historiography:

God exerts causality in world affairs by means of specific and decisive interventions, including not only global historical events but also specific theophanies, miracles, acts of inspiration, and punishments and rewards....

To this we should add that the world is viewed as an arena in which God and his angels and saints do battle with Satan and his minions. There is a divine plan for the world, and God is active behind the scenes, working through human agents and institutions, to achieve it, while the Devil works in a likewise manner to thwart it.

What does providentialism look like in practice? In the monastic chronicles of Latin Christendom, produced roughly 800 to 1200 c.e., historical events are the visible manifestations of God’s invisible master plan. “The great task of medieval historiography,” wrote Collingwood (1946:53), “was the task of discovering and expounding this... divine plan.” According to Ernest Breisach (1994:127), “The historian’s task was not to find the truth but to show how God works his will throughout time.” This task was accomplished in two ways: firstly, by delineating the grand sweep of world history, and secondly, by a watchful interest in miracles and portents. The two modes correlate more or less with different compositional strategies, and so a typical medieval chronicle usually consists of two linked parts (cf. Breisach 1994:126–30). The first usually begins with a cursory review of (in Hodgson’s words) “global historical events” — starting with Creation, say, or the division of the world after the Flood — derived from the Bible, Patristic sources, and ancient chronicles. The second section will have to do with more contemporaneous events, usually composed in an annalistic style. In this section the focus is often on (again, in Hodgson’s words) “specific theophanies, miracles, acts of inspiration, and punishments and rewards.” And it is here especially that we may see a kind of divination at work.

Christian chronicles are replete with reports of bloody moons, lactiferous statues, and other such *omina et curiosa* (cf. Brandt 1966:52–59).

According to Nancy Partner (1977:214), “the most frequent and cursory moments of divine interference with the world consisted of bizarre or unexpected variations on natural phenomena and were interpreted as warnings of future misfortune or adverse judgments on the present.” Wars, invasions, and other forms of violent breakdown also loom large in medieval chronicles, where they may be interpreted as divine chastisements for sinful behavior. Such interpretation, however, is often implicit. Medieval chronicles are well known for their reliance on parataxis. The chronicler puts together two events without explicit causal connection and leaves it for his audience to discern the role of divine providence in their conjunction. We will see all of these features in the Kievan *Primary Chronicle*.

Kievan (or Kyivan) Rus’ is the name of the first East Slavic state. It flourished from roughly 850 to 1250 C.E., when it was overrun by the Mongols. It is the rootstock of modern-day Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, all three of which claim its legacy. Rus’ converted to Christianity in its Byzantine (Orthodox) form in 988 C.E. The monastic clergy were the purveyors of the imported ideology. It was they who mastered, not Latin as in the West, but the prestige language of Old Church Slavonic and who were most associated with the production of texts. They did so in close collaboration with the princes of Rus’, for this was an era, as Andrzej Poppe (1997:337) says, “when Christianity was turned more toward rulers, their courts, their magnates and courtly and armed retinue, and appeared in harmony with earthly strivings toward legal order, building in stone, and education.”

These two vectors — the princely and the monastic — come together in the *Primary Chronicle*. The text was largely produced at the famous Caves Monastery, which had close familial ties with the best families in Rus’. Princes patronized the work (Rukavishnikov 2003). It is conceivable that they read the *Primary Chronicle* or had it read to them. I.P. Eremin (1966:52–54) suggested that the *Primary Chronicle* was intended as a “table book” for the princes of Rus’. Historical events offered lessons for future conduct. Indeed, on several occasions (e.g., *sub anno* 1019) the chroniclers say that such-and-such happened as an admonition to the Rus’ princes. One is reminded of Gellner’s remark that “the messengers of a universal and impersonal, trans-social redemption gradually turn into the maintenance and servicing personnel” of the new social structure (1988:92).

In its social location, its compositional structure, its choice of topics and methods of interpretation, the *Primary Chronicle* is a typical medieval Christian chronicle. The first part of the text consists of stories that seek to place the Rus' in relation to the great peoples and events of salvation history. The overall thrust in the beginning section is cosmographic and genealogical, with connective filaments established between Rus' and the Tower of Babel story, the distributions of peoples after the Flood, and the peregrinations of the Apostles. After that the text settles down into an annalistic format, extending from the year 852 C.E. to about 1110 C.E. (depending on the redaction). The text is a complex and layered on, what Russian philologists call a *svod*, a compilation. As far as we can tell, the chronicle was composed in an open, agglutinative manner, by multiple hands (Timberlake 2001; Gippius 2001). Relevant here is the *Primary Chronicle's* status as a kind of entrepôt, with different kinds of text "stashed" within its annalistic structure, such as monastic *vitae*, quotations from biblical and patristic sources, and sizeable chunks from Byzantine world chronicles. The nature of the *Primary Chronicle's* "logos" — as a textual depository and annalistic record composed in response to historical events — will be an important factor in our consideration of the text's divinatory qualities.

The *Primary Chronicle* is a specimen of providential historiography. Events are viewed as reflections or instruments of God's divine plan. Great attention is given to the conversion of Rus' in 988 and the florescence of Christianity in Rus' due to the labors of princes and monks. That is the good news. But there is also bad news — of terrifying raids by nomads, internecine fighting among the princes of Rus', pagan recidivism, the infernal tricks of native magi, and so on. A good portion of the text is occupied with a kind of medieval "damage control." In this connection considerable attention is given in the annalistic portion to signs (*znameniia*) such as comets or eclipses; and chastisements, such as invasions or *jacqueries*. These happenings are deciphered through the lens of the Bible, Byzantine world chronicles, and other works of sacred literature. Let us consider some entries where we see the chroniclers' hermeneutic most fully on display.

The entry for the year 1065 registers three omens that occurred in Rus:

... there was a portent in the west in the form of an exceedingly large star with bloody rays, which rose out of the west after sunset. It was visible for a week and

appeared with no good presage. . . . At this time, a child was cast into the Setoml' [river]. Some fishermen pulled it up in their net. We then gazed upon I till evening, when they cast it back into the water because it was malformed. . . . Somewhat before this moment, the sun also suffered alteration, and instead of being bright, became rather like the moon. (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:144).

These phenomena are said to presage an attack against the land of Rus'. The chronicler's interpretation of them begins with a generalizing statement that such signs "portend no good." He then introduces analogous cases drawn from Christian salvation history. To do so he uses the *Chronograph*, an abridgement of the Byzantine chronicles of Malalas and Hamartolos. Similar phenomena are said to have occurred during the reigns of various Roman/Byzantine emperors: Antiochus, Nero, Justinian, and Constantine the Iconoclast. When mysterious riders appeared throughout Jerusalem, this presaged Antiochus' attack on the city. When, during the reign of Nero, a spear-like star appeared over the same city, this portended the Roman invasion. A shining star and a dark sun foreshadowed various rebellions, pestilence, and general evil. During the time of the Emperor Mauricius, it is said that "a woman bore a child without eyes and without hands, and a fish-tail grew to his back." After an earthquake in Syria, "a mule issued forth from the earth, speaking with a human voice and prophesying the incursion of the pagans, which actually took place" (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:145).

The Byzantine precedents adduced in the *Primary Chronicle* entry parallel the phenomena reported from Rus'. In both cases we are dealing with occurrences in the sky, malformed births, etc.; in both cases, such occurrences are taken as warning signs of war or invasion. This correlation is driven home by specific lexical correspondences:

Events in Rus'

a sign occurred
a star
the sun . . . was not lit
child
many murders
attack against Rus
byst' znamen'e
zvezda
solntse . . . ne byst' svetlo

Precedents from Chronograph

occurred
a star rose
the sun [was] without light
child
killing
assault on Jerusalem
byst'
vosiia zvezda
solntse bez luch'

detishch'
se zhe proiavliashe
nashestvie... na
Rus'skuiu zemliu

detishche'
se zhe proiavliashe
nakhozhen'e... na
Ierusalim'

(Likhachev and Adrianova-Peretts 1950:110–11)

The Rus' chronicler develops a point-by-point correlation. But this is not done explicitly; the two sets of phenomena are basically juxtaposed and it is left to the reader (or auditor) to make the necessary connections. However, as noted above, such parataxis (juxtaposing as opposed to subordinating elements) is common in medieval chronicles. Through this particular rhetorical strategy, the chronicler proposes a "fit" between the happenings in Rus' and events catalogued in an authoritative text.

The *Chronograph* is called upon to help explain some other puzzling phenomena recorded in the entry for the year 1114 (Hypatian redaction). The chronicler relates his journey to Ladoga (a town in the northern region of Rus, near Novgorod):

When I had come to Ladoga, the Ladogans informed me that "Here, after a great storm, our children find little glass eyes, both small and big, and bored through; they gather up others from beside the Volkhov river, which the water splashes out."

The chronicler notes that he obtained more than a hundred of these little glass "eyes." He also registers his amazement upon hearing of this phenomenon. But the people of Ladoga tell him,

This is not amazing; there are still some old men who traveled beyond the Iugra and Samoyad' and themselves saw, in the northern regions, how a storm descends and from that storm fall young squirrels — as if just born — and, having grown, scatter about the land; or again, there occurs another storm, and young deer fall from it, and they grow and disperse throughout the land. (Likhachev and Adrianova-Peretts 1950:399–401; my translation)

This additional testimony does not really diminish the remarkableness of the glass beads; it only places that particular occurrence within a wider range of startling incidents.

Returning home to Kiev, the chronicler attempted to puzzle this out. He found other canonical instances of items falling from the sky. As if to head off the incredulity of his audience, he begins his account by

saying, “If someone does not believe this, let him read the *Chronograph*” (*Ashche li kto semu very ne imet’, da pochtet’ fronograf*). What follows are excerpts taken from this compendium concerning unusual objects falling from the heavens. We learn that once during a storm wheat fell, which was gathered up and filled large bins. Under Aurelius, silver grains fell, while in Africa three huge stones dropped from the skies. The next excerpt talks about Hephaestus, who is euhemeristically identified as an ancient ruler of Egypt. We learn that, during his reign, tongs fell from the heavens and he began to forge weapons with them. Besides the obvious thematic parallels, there are again lexical correspondences between the description of the Ladoga phenomena and these cases reported in the *Chronograph*.

Events in Rus’

great storm-cloud

fell

a storm-cloud occurs

tucha velika

spade

byvaet drugaiia tucha

Precedents in *Chronograph*

great storm-clouds

fell

rain having occurred

tuchi velitsii

spade

dozhg’tsiu byvshiu

Once again, this semantic parallelism suggests there is a “fit” between incidents in Rus’ and sacred history.

Stepping back from the entry in question, we can see that the chronicler drew upon a tome from his authoritative corpus of texts and applied what he took to be relevant passages in order to solve a contemporary problem (Franklin 1983:525). The problem, in a nutshell, is that objects — beads, animals — do not normally fall from the sky. When objects reportedly *did* do that, the chronicler felt compelled to decipher the meaning of it. The chronicler acts like a diviner: he observes and records anomalous happenings; he consults his textual *instrumentarium* for analogues or precedents; he establishes a rhetorical fit between the events “on the ground” (or rather “in the air”) and his text. He also attempts to head off rival interpretations, as diviners do, when he directs doubters to check the *Chronograph* for themselves.

The entry for the year 1096 also deals with troubling anomalies emanating from the edge of the world. But whereas the occurrences listed in 1114 have a fantastical tone, the phenomena discussed under

1096 are doomful. In the entry we read that the nomadic Polovtsy attacked the Caves Monastery itself. According to the chronicle account (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:183–84), the invaders carried off icons, burned down structures, killed some of the brethren, and berated the Christian deity. After recounting these horrors, the chronicler shifts into exegetical mode. “Of course,” notes Khazanov (1994:2), “the emotions and impressions of many of those who personally lived through or witnessed the invasions of nomads scarcely differ from the feelings of the biblical prophets...” Indeed, the vivid first-hand account by the Kievan writer has a strong biblical resonance. However, in his explicit commentary, the chronicler resorts to the extra-biblical *Revelation* of Pseudo-Methodios.

This is a historical-eschatological work that enjoyed wide currency throughout medieval Christendom, both East and West. In terms of content, the *Revelation* presents a history of the world from Adam to the Apocalypse. The various stages of the *eschaton* are delineated. Attention is given in particular to the Ishmaelites, who were driven into the Etriv desert and who will come forth again at the end of time, and to the “unclean” peoples, who were locked up by Alexander the Great and who will also be loosed upon the world.

The *Primary Chronicle* author uses this text to make sense of the Polovtsy. He tries to “place” the Polovtsy in terms of eschatological geography. He begins by noting that they came from the Etriv desert in the northeast, and that four races have come hence: the Torkmens, Pechenegs, Torks, and Polovtsy. “Methodius relates concerning them,” says the chronicler (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:184), that Gideon slaughtered four races and drove eight into the desert. The chronicler recognizes that “others say” the Polovtsy are the sons of Ammon (Lot’s son), but “this is not true.” Rather, these are the sons of Ishmael. And after they appear at the end of the world, the unclean peoples locked up by Alexander the Great will issue forth.

The passage is confused and confusing, yet the basic thrust of the chronicler’s explanation is clear: the Polovtsy number among the “sons” of Ishmael driven into the desert and awaiting their return at the end of time. The chronicler has recourse — most likely from memory — to an authoritative text, the *Revelation* of Pseudo-Methodios, in order to disclose the true significance of these people. He rejects the opinion offered by “others.”

The mention of unclean peoples locked up by Alexander the Great leads into the second component of the 1096 entry (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:184–85). The chronicler states that he would like to recount what Gyuryata Rogovich of the city of Novgorod told him. A servant of Gyuryata went among the Iugra in the North. They told him of a “strange marvel.” They had encountered a huge mountain which reaches to the heavens. Cries and voices emanate from within this mountain — the people inside are trying to get out. A small hole is bored through. But one cannot understand the language of those inside. They point at things as if to ask for them. The road to this mountain is very difficult of access.

The chronicle writer goes on, “I said to Gyuryata, ‘These are the people shut up by Emperor Alexander the Great.’” He explains that, when Alexander reached the eastern lands, he encountered the unclean races of Japheth. These races ate every unclean thing. They did not bury their dead, but ate them instead. Alexander was fearful that they would corrupt the earth. So, by God’s command, they were driven into the North and enclosed in a great mountain, barricaded by indestructible doors. At the end of the world, the peoples from the Etriv desert shall issue forth, as well as these peoples from the mountain.

This is a good example of the chronicle’s problem-solving, divination-like discourse. A “strange marvel” is reported to the chronicler. The chronicler, who speaks in the first person, discloses the true nature of the phenomenon in question. This interpretation is supported by a reference to an authoritative text, the *Revelation* of Pseudo-Methodios. There is a sort of triangulation between the “Old Rus’ annalist,” the “bookish tradition,” and the “experiences of Novgorod contacts” (Chekin 1992:17).

From a close study of the *Primary Chronicle*’s “logos,” it is clear that “providential divination” was an organizing force behind the text’s production. This claim is based not only on the fact that the chroniclers take notice of celestial and terrestrial omens, very much in the manner of the ancient mantic disciplines. Nor, either, does it hinge on the fact that the chroniclers apply relevant passages of sacred texts to contemporary circumstances. Zeitlyn (2001:231) is correct to warn that that criterion alone would make all of religion in effect divinatory. Instead, what is determinative here is the fact that we see in the *Primary Chronicle* is an *ensemble* of components: the notation of ominous occurrences,

sometimes based on first-hand observation; the methodical interpretations using a textual *instrumentarium*; the repudiations of alternative interpretations; and on occasion the admonitions directed at their patrons or clients. Not every element is present every time. Sometimes just an omen is recorded; sometimes just that and a minimal interpretation. But insofar as the ensemble is realized, to that extent the text takes on a divinatory quality. What the chroniclers were doing in their Kievan monastery was not unlike the hermeneutic labors of the scribe-diviners in ancient Rome or Nineveh.

Conspiratorial Historiography

Whether conspiracy theories are “as old as historiography” itself (Laqueur 1993:34) or of more recent vintage, being only “connected to the great events of European history since 1750” (Pipes 1997:171), they constitute a form of historical discourse. Keeley (1999:116) defines a conspiracy theory as “a proposed explanation of some historical event (or events) in terms of the significant causal agency of a relatively small group of persons — the conspirators — acting in history.” Conspiracism is that discourse which posits that “conspiracies drive history” (Pipes 1997:42–43).

Although the following statement is about Russia, it provides a useful starting point for parsing the phenomenon of conspiracism:

When cataclysmic events shock a country to its foundations, when people feel impotent before history’s tidal wave, when a war, economic collapse, or political disintegration mark the end of a historical era and... signal the beginning of an uncertain future, a certain segment of any society will turn to the comfort and easy, all-encompassing fantasies in order to explain the heretofore inexplicable and to find something, *someone* to blame. Disaster is far easier to digest if an enemy... is apparent. (Allensworth 1998:120)

When cataclysmic events... To begin with, conspiracism seems to flourish at times of uncertainty and calamity, when there is disease in the body politic (cf. Pipes 1997:178). The subject matter of conspiracism ranges from the global to the local. Conspiracy theorists even “look for a hidden hand behind such natural phenomena as earth-

quakes, storms, and abnormally warm weather” (Pipes 1997:45) — the familiar stuff of medieval providentialism.

... *when people feel impotent*. . . . Timothy Melley writes of “agency panic,” the sense that one’s actions are ultimately ineffective and that a historical situation is being controlled *outside* of oneself by “powerful, external agents” (Melley 1999:vii, cf. 5). Cataclysmic events understandably produce agency panic.

... *the comfort and easy, all-encompassing fantasies in order to explain*. . . . There are two salient points here. First, observers concur that conspiracy theories provide certainty in times of trouble. “The conspiratorial world view,” says Keeley, “offers us the comfort of knowing that while tragic events occur, they at least occur for a reason, and that the greater the event, the greater and more significant the reason.” Conspiracy theories provide an “odd sort of comfort” (Melley 1999:8). That is one point.

Second, conspiracism has an “all-encompassing” quality. Conspiracy theories provide “neat explanations in an untidy and big world where there is no great centre anymore” (Parish and Parker 2001:6). There are no accidents, no chance events (Pipes 1997:45). In fact, conspiracism even surpasses providentialism in its encompassing grasp. As Keeley explains,

The first and foremost virtue which conspiracy theories exhibit, and which accounts for much of their apparent strength, is the virtue of unified explanation or explanatory reach. . . . Unified explanation is the *sine qua non* of conspiracy theories. Conspiracy theories *always* explain more than competing theories, because by invoking a conspiracy, they can explain *both* the data of the received account *and* the errant data the received theory fails to explain (1999:119).

But not everyone can grasp the unified explanation. Like providentialism (and divination too), the discourse of conspiracism implies a privileged observer, one who can see past outward appearances, lift the veil, disclose what really happened. There is a kind of “double doctrine” (Pipes 1997:63) at work. Only a “select few . . . have the capacity to identify the real forces shaping historical events” (Laqueur 1993:180). The rest remain on the “anodyne” level (Pipes 1997:63).

This privileged interpreter follows a *discipline*, a *practice*. Stewart makes a crucial point about conspiracism:

Think of it not as a prefabricated ideology (as if abstract, exegetical ideas were what ruled the world) but as a practice. . . . It's a practice born of a world that cries out for interpretation. . . . Conspiracy theory is a skeptical, paranoid, obsessive practice of scanning for signs and sifting through bits of evidence for the missing link. . . . It tracks: it channels as it goes about its seemingly mundane and obsessively focused task of sniffing out the smoking gun. . . . It's a way of tracking events and phenomena in an 'information society' with (more than) a twist of trauma. (1999:14–17; order altered)

Conspiracy theories “scan” and “track” in and through the written word (Pipes 1997:50). They entail a “texting” of the world (Stewart 1999:17). Conspiracism is above all a matter of *books*, texts which function as a kind of x-ray machine, letting one see behind the façade of external events. Svetlana Boym writes (1999:99),

Usually there is a secret/sacred conspiratorial text — The Book of *Illuminati*, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the Terence Diaries (favored by the American militia movement) — that functions like a Bible and is read as a revelation or a prophecy rather than a text written or compiled by an individual author; it invites incantation, not critical interpretation.

As in classic text-based divination or the providential divination of medieval chroniclers, one makes sense of the traumas of life through these special books.

By way of example, I turn now to the specific case of conspiracy theories in post-Soviet Russia. The first years after the collapse of the USSR were a period of “shock and awe.” Pundits and pensioners alike were stunned by the crumbling of the Soviet superpower. The collapse of the Soviet Union has been called “the greatest political earthquake of our time” (Laqueur 1993:viii). Russia in the 1990s was a society in which societal and governmental structures collapsed or ceased to function; crime, corruption, and poverty multiplied (Devlin 1999:xvii). It was an exhilarating but unsettling time. New freedoms abounded, but gone was the safety net which Soviet society had provided — jobs, education, health care, etc. Russian society became “unanchored.” Thousands of women turned to the sex trade. Hundreds of thousands of children languished in orphanages (Twigg 2002:152). There emerged a yawning gap between the rich and the poor, the poorest of which subsisted on a diet of cats, dogs, crows, and pigeons. In 1998, for instance,

a majority of Russians described their economic plight as either “bad or very bad” or “intolerable” (White 2000:158). Murder and mafia shootings — and even a few isolated cases of cannibalism — grabbed the headlines.

In the 1990s ardent debates about the past, present, and future of post-Soviet Russia filled the media. Most of the debates were carried out in newspapers, like the liberal *Moskovskie novosti* and the conservative *Sovetskaia Rossiia*, as well as a plethora of smaller, more ephemeral publications (Knox 2005:37–38; cf. Shenfield 2001:6). Each interest group had its own papers and periodicals, although there could be confusing mixtures and strange bed-fellows (Lovell 2000:153–54). Moscow alone could boast roughly 30 newspapers of “a fascist or antisemitic orientation” (Moskovich 1999:87). Conspiracy theories have flourished in these nationalist and “red-brown” publications. The regnant theory, articulated in different variations, was that the historical crisis of post-Soviet Russia, like all wars, revolutions, and historical crises before it, was ultimately brought about by “the machinations of *Zhidomasonstvo*” (Allensworth 1998:132) — that is, “Jewmasonry” (Laqueur 1993:38).

It was in this milieu that the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, the notorious forgery, “surfaced again from the subterranean” (Boym 1999:98). “Russia’s major contribution to twentieth-century racial anti-Semitism” (Petrovsky-Shtern 2003:395), this text, “the bread and butter source of anti-Semitic conspiratology,” which has been translated into dozens of languages and seems to keep re-appearing throughout the world, enjoyed new popularity in Russia at this time (Allensworth 1998:128). For many the events of 1917 “proved” the validity of the *Protocols*; similarly, the tumultuous events of 1990–91 seemed once again to justify one’s faith in this enigmatic text (Laqueur 1993:103; cf. Levy 16). The *Protocols* was sold in Moscow from 1990 on (Devlin 1999:28). Anyone who spent time in Russia during those hurly-burly years remembers the kiosks and metro stalls peddling a hodgepodge of literature (cf. Lovell 2000:130–31). This text, which is “not innocent literature,” was sold in innocuous settings, as Boym (1999:108) captures in a pitch-perfect way:

The Protocols of Zion (an un-critical edition) [was] widely sold on the streets alongside Yeltsin dolls, Easter eggs with portraits of Nicholas II, Dale Carnegie’s *How to Succeed in Business*, and the most up-to-date Buddhist manuals.

Not insignificantly, there was also a connection to the Orthodox Church. The *Protocols* was reportedly distributed from church kiosks (Shenfield 2001:69–71) and even read in church services (Pipes 1997:85). The book was actively promoted by some Russian Orthodox clergy.

The cleric most associated with conspiracy theories and the *Protocols* was Ioann, Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, the third highest-ranking prelate in the Russian Orthodox Church. Ioann, who lived from 1927 to 1995, was one of the most outspoken figures in post-communist Russia. A polarizing figure within and without the Russian Church, he railed against Catholics, Protestants, Americans, Masons, and Jews — all of whom, in his view, singly and in concert have for centuries tried to attack and undermine Russia. His views “were not official church policy, but they had broad resonance in the early 1990s when Russian society was seeking a new national identity to fill the void left by the evaporation of Soviet ideology” (Slater 2000:314). Certain rough parallels can be seen with Pat Robertson, another divisive conspiracy-minded minister of political theology, or with Father Coughlin in a previous era.

In Ioann’s worldview, Russia is both victor and victim. Russia is a sacred land, chosen by inscrutable divine providence to be the ark of salvation. Yet it is relentlessly attacked by protean and diabolical enemies. Russian history is that of unremitting struggle and suffering. Ioann’s writings are full of tenebrous litanies of wars and invasions. Although he speaks of Holy Russia, a good case can be made that, in reality, Ioann

... was actually nostalgic for something more than Holy Russia, namely, her successor, that great power that dominated Eurasia from Germany to China, that launched men into space and boasted of a military might second to none.... The totalitarian state *was* Russia in his eyes, and Russia, reduced to an abstraction, his god. (Allensworth 1998:133)

Soviet Russia was his lodestar. Perhaps this is why Ioann’s tirades were able to find a home in a “red” newspaper.

In the early 1990s, Ioann wrote numerous short articles for the pro-communist paper, *Sovetskaia Rossiia* [Soviet Russia]. In a telling ideological convergence, these sermon-like tracts were published in an insert for that paper called *Rus’ pravoslavnaia* [Orthodox Rus’: Rus’ being the mythistorical predecessor of modern-day Russia]. They were later col-

lected and codified by Ioann's followers (e.g., Ioann 2000). Today there is an active campaign for his canonization, and his writings play an important part in that (Slater 2000:317). I turn now to two articles in particular which exemplify Ioann's hermetic form of historiography.

A good illustration of Ioann's discourse is an article called "*Russkii uzel*" (= Ioann 2000:119–32) which means the Russian knot or focal point (cf. Steeves 1994). In this piece Ioann presents an analysis of Russia's parlous situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He begins his with an apparent paradox: how is it that the Soviet Union could simply collapse after having survived seven decades of hunger, terrifying repression, the fiercest war in human history, and incredible economic pressure from the West? What forces are influencing this course of events? To answer these questions, says Ioann, one must comprehend the deep structure of the historical process in general and Russian history in particular. Ioann's vision of this history is dualistic: human existence is an arena where two hidden spiritual forces contend. On one side is the Divine Law, which God has inscribed on the tablet's of a person's soul; over against it; are the mutinous impulses of pride, greed, and hypocrisy. These two forces contend within each and every individual. But this antagonism is to be found not only on a personal, individual level, but on a social and indeed cosmic level, for the human is but a microcosm of the whole, reflecting in his or her most secret depth the structure of the universe.

Ioann moves from these global principles to the case of Russia in particular. Ioann asserts that God, in His incomprehensible providence, appointed Russia to be the ark of his holy things. This explains why Russia's history has been so difficult and confusing. For Christ predicted that people would fall from His teachings, and His enemies would band together. This, proclaims Ioann, is the "solution" (*razgadka* — a word with a divinatory timbre) to Russian history. As the earthly protector of the Divine Law, Russia could not help but become the focal point or nerve center of the universal struggle between good and evil.

Having laid bare the deep structure of world and Russian history, Ioann turns his attention to contemporary affairs. And here the discourse of providentialism morphs into that of conspiracism. Once again, says Ioann, Russia is undergoing the ferocious onslaught of satanic malice. Once again, the enemies of Russia are ranged against her. In Ioann's scheme these present-day enemies turn out to be various

international forces spearheaded by the “intellectual elite and global bankers.” Their goals are a de-nationalization of peoples, an international economic system, and a world government. The coding is clear. But Russia alone stands in the way, frustrating their plans for global hegemony. No religious confession except Orthodoxy has the spiritual might to counter such evil. No country except Russia possesses the cultural, scientific, economic, and military prowess to thwart their pernicious programs.

The enemies’ first attempt to weaken Russia was the Revolution of 1917, with its “international proletariat,” designed to obliterate Russian national consciousness. That having failed, the enemies now try to overcome Russia through “perestroika,” with its slogans of “democracy” and “market economics.” Both the revolution and perestroika were deliberately designed to enervate Russia. Ioann ends with a call to spiritual arms: “let us prepare ourselves for the temptations, enticements and wild urges of the dark forces.”

In this article Ioann performs a divinatory act, arrogating to himself a kind of vatic authority. He proposes a plausibility structure for making sense of Russia’s latest time of troubles. He claims that the collapse of the U.S.S.R. occurred “without any visible causes”; that one needs to fathom the “deep structure of the historical process”; that “secret and concealed” spiritual powers are involved; and that this is the “solution” to the riddle of Russia’s turbulent history both past and present. He ends with a plan of action: “let us prepare ourselves...” (cf. Bennett 1999:236).

An article called “*Bitva za Rossiia*” (Ioann 2000:63–74) offers more of a text-based divination. (The title means “The Battle for Russia,” but it was translated in an abridged version as “The West Wants Chaos” [Nielsen 1994:107–12] which I quote here.) The article begins again by speaking of “the whole course of world history” and more particularly “the history of our fatherland.” Russia’s past, says Ioann, is “strewn with thorns,” its “ten centuries are filled with wars and unrest, of invasion by foreigners, and subversion by its own traitors” (107). He then traces this history from Prince Vladimir’s conversion in 988 down through the centuries, enumerating the wars and assaults which have wreaked havoc on the nation. The conclusion he reaches is this: “Time and again the enemies of Russia forged plans for the enslavement of Russia” (108).

Then, he says, a most interesting (or “most curious”: *liubopytneishii*) document appeared: *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. He briefly reviews the document’s publishing history. Although some dispute its genuineness, he says, it has given us “much to think about” in terms of world history. What follows are several extended quotations from the *Protocols*. The first has to do with violence and the rousing of the masses; the second with the evisceration of religion; the third with control of the press and the production of “crazy, despicable literature.” He then concludes:

To readers who like to stick to concrete facts, we would say that the “Protocols” have predicted the two world wars, the political forms of government for decades, the development of the world economy, the course of credit and financial politics, and numerous other details of the life of the “Independent Community of States (GUS)” with shattering exactness.

A final quotation is proffered having to do with the intended destruction of nation-states. “Compare it,” invites Ioann, “with what has happened in Russia today.”

This type of knowing remark recurs throughout the article. “Judge for yourselves,” he says (109). “Every intelligent person can draw his own conclusion from what has been said” (110). “Let us look around” (111). As in classic text-based divination, Ioann is trying to show that there is a fit (of “shattering exactness”) between the arcane text and the situation on the ground. His juxtaposition of quotations culled from this “most interesting” document with descriptions of Russia’s recent historical vicissitudes is supposed to create a synaptic flash of recognition. But no explicit links are actually enunciated by Ioann — his is a parataxis of innuendo. He ends with a similarly oblique rallying cry: “Now is the time to take stock and to settle the score of the centuries” (112).

At a time of societal breakdown the likes of which most non-Russians can scarcely appreciate, the high-ranking cleric presents his flock — his “clients” — with a divination-like reading of historical events, albeit of an “armchair” (or perhaps one should say “ex cathedra”) variety. Divination works by making “concrete and simple those issues that are complex...” Its power lies in the fact that it “... focuses on a specific issue and segregates a cause and cure by which to define and manage the situation” (Mendosa 1982:9–10). As I see it, this is

what Metropolitan Ioann does in his “texting” of the humiliations visited upon Russia.

Conclusion

There is an age-old link between divination and the writing of history. In the ancient world, graphic inscriptions of divinatory happenings or consultations provided a kind of rudimentary chronicle. The historian and the seer might be one and the same person. I have tried to show how providential and conspiratorial forms of historiography, as exemplified in the *Primary Chronicle* and the articles of Ioann, bear a resemblance to classic text-based divination. By way of conclusion I want to alight on several connections between these disciplines (“to draw lines joining the parts”: Wittgenstein 1979:13), and pose some questions for further research.

First, it is good to remember that conspiracism and providentialism are forms of *historical* discourse. They are not about mysterious other-worldly planes or internal states of consciousness. As discourses they have a hard texture, an unmistakable this-worldly quality. They comprise a social-historical *imaginaire*. A classic providential history talks of priests and peoples, monks and monarchs, the blessed and benighted. Its subject matter will be the fate of nations, the rise and fall of empires. Biblical texts speak of God using different nations to fulfill his divine plan. For the authors of the *Primary Chronicle*, the Rus', the Byzantines, the Polovtsy, and others, continue this pattern. Conspiracy theories have a similar outlook insofar as they focus on the role of certain social groups — Jews, Masons, Catholics, NATO, the Club of Rome, etc. — in the churning of historical events. The *dramatis personae* of Russian conspiratology include “cosmopolitans,” “Zionists,” “world Jewry,” “spiritual occupiers,” “puppeteers,” “biorobots,” and “nomads” (Moskovich 1999). For Ioann it is the rapacious, technocratic West, and ultimately the Jews, who manipulate the hidden levers of history and who want to subjugate and destroy Holy Rus'. Of course, a major difference between the two discourses is that the trajectory of providential history heads upward, arcing (despite some setbacks) ultimately to redemption, while that of conspiracism tends downward, to powerlessness or enslavement.

Providentialism and conspiracism have a hermetic quality. Historical incidents are the outward manifestation of unseen forces. Things are not what they seem. Beneath the surface there is a deeper meaning, an interconnected system of causation. Medieval historians think in terms of a divine plan, while conspiracy theorists chant the mantra of secret plots (cf. Stewart 1999:14). Uncovering the plan or the plot is a divination-like exercise. Conspiracy theorists “depend heavily on the interpretation of half-hidden clues, tell-tale signs, and secret messages” (Melley 1999:16). This is historiography *per signum*.

The starting point in divination, providentialism, and conspiracism, is the particular. Divination is about providing insight into specific problematic or uncertain situations. It asks not “Why do we die?” but “Why did that villager die?” Consider this inventory from a fragmentary Slavonic text known as the *Volkhovnik* or *Book of the Wizard* (quoted in Ryan 1999:140):

1. the house creaks
2. ear-ringing
3. crow-cawing
4. a cock crows
5. the fire roars
6. a dog howls
7. mouse squeak
8. a mouse gnaws clothes
9. a toad croaks
10. a cat miaows
11. a muscle twitches
12. a dream frightens
20. a horse neighs
21. ox mounts ox
22. a bee sings

Here we have an atomistic framework in which each discrete occurrence is thought to convey hidden meaning. Or consider this tongue in cheek account of *Soviet* divination: “dreaming of *matreshki* (wooden nesting dolls) meant the arrival of tourists, a new television meant a fire (based on the propensity of Soviet televisions to explode), while woodpeckers meant night visitors (i.e. the KGB, based on the popular term for an informer *stukach*, the one who knocks)” (Wigzell 1998:168–69). Providentialism is drawn toward “above the fold” events — eclipses,

earthquakes, crop failures, invasions — the specific ways that God is thought to communicate his will. The annalistic format of medieval chronicles (a distant echo of the Roman *Annales maximi*?) reinforces this episodic quality. Conspiracism, for its part, latches on to certain spectacular episodes — “points of focus,” as Stewart calls them — like the Kennedy assassination or the downing of TWA flight 800.

Yet one recognizes in these discourses a totalizing impulse. The *Volkovnik* seems to invest the whole environment with divinatory significance. The scribe-diviners of Mesopotamia catalogued every conceivable kind of celestial omen — even ones that cannot physically occur (Rochberg 2004). Providentialism registers every historical event in terms of the economy of providence. A good expression of this point may be found in Hollis Read’s *The Hand of God in History, or Divine Providence Historically Illustrated in the Extension and Establishment of Christianity* (1862:11, 13):

All veritable history is but an exponent of Providence; and it cannot but interest the mind of intelligent piety, to trace the hand of God in all the changes and revolutions of our world’s history. . . . All past history is but the unraveling of God’s eternal plan respecting our race. The whole course of human events is made finally to subserve this one great purpose. . . . This is the golden thread that passes through its entire web. . . .

And such is Providence; a deep, unfathomable deep . . . so boundless, every where active, all-influential, that none but the infinite Mind can survey and comprehend its wonder-working operations; so mighty, all-controlling. . . .

Conspiracism shares this hermetic, totalizing gaze, and indeed it would not be too difficult to replace the words “God” and “Providence” in Read’s statement with, say, “Jewmasonry.” Seemingly unrelated episodes can be graphed on the same line. There is a New World Order. It is deep, cavernous, all-controlling. In Melley’s view a conspiracy theory is a “totalizing explanation” (44), “a ‘master narrative,’ a grand scheme capable of explaining numerous complex events” (Melley 1999:8). For this reason conspiracy theories typically put great emphasis on shapes — circles, triangles, systems, networks, webs, or *uzel* in Russian (cf. Pipes 1997:23; Melley 1999:8).

Thus, there is a particularizing and totalizing dynamic at work at the same time, which I take to be fundamental to these discourses. They

oscillate between the sweep of global events and isolated incidents of an epiphanic nature. “The scanning gaze,” writes Stewart (1999:16) of conspiracism, “finds objects — points of focus — that combine the mechanics of ‘system’ with the mechanics of ‘eruption’ or dramatic ‘intrusion.’” Much the same could be said for providentialism.

Privileged interpreters make sense of these “eruptions” or “intrusions” through certain sacred/secret texts. There is *bookish* quality to all of these discourses. As in text-based divination, problems and calamities befalling the state are interpreted in light of special texts, texts which may not be originally divinatory at all. The text will have an “aura of comprehensiveness,” its totality of graphic marks taken to match the physical world outside the text. The book “exhausts reality, or at least covers all significant situations that diviners or exegetes might encounter” (Henderson 1999:83). Sometimes *historical* texts can be put to *divinatory* use. Such is the case, for example, with the Confucian *Spring and Autumn Annals*. According to John Henderson, “the assumption of cosmic comprehensiveness helped to transform the *Annals* into a natural set of signs that could serve as a kind of instrument of divination” (83). In medieval Christianity one recognizes a similar *reverence* for *reference* works of all-inclusive scope (McArthur 1986:46). For the Kievan chroniclers, like their counterparts throughout Christendom, the Bible functioned as a kind of “Encyclopedia Christiana” (cf. McArthur 1986:37). The Byzantino-Slavonic *Chronograph* was another historical text that likewise functioned in a mantic capacity. It presented the Kievan bookmen with a panorama of strange and fascinating places and personages, a capacious corpus of precedents which could be used in the interpretation of specific events in Rus’ (Franklin 1983).

For Metropolitan Ioann and numerous other conspiracy theorists, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* constitutes the “veritable Rosetta stone of history, the single key that unlocks all the perplexing mysteries of the modern world” (Levy 1995:7). But unlike the Bible or *Chronograph*, the *Protocols* seems to gain its “aura of comprehensiveness” not by its bulky size or panoramic scope, but rather by its imprecision. As Pipes (1997:85) observes, “The book’s vagueness — almost no names, dates or issues are specific — has been one key to this wide-ranging success.” Levy (1995:12) takes up this point: “Unlike almost every other antisemitic work, [the *Protocols*] has no national context or identity. It names

few names, speaks to no specific national problems, and is therefore able to serve a great variety of purpose.” If one wants to read Russia between the lines, the text offers little resistance.

The aura that surrounds the divinatory text, I would submit, is due not only to size or ambiguity, but also to origin. Like the famous story of how the *Libri Sybillini* were acquired by King Tarquin, the “notoriously murky circumstances” (Petrovsky-Shtern 2003:399) of their composition and publication seem to endow the *Protocols* with a mysterious quality. Where did this text come from? Is it really a forgery? This “most curious” document “came to light,” says Ioann. And it is the insinuation of being leaked — the most sensational leak of all time — which is part of the frisson.

“They fit,” proclaimed Henry Ford, automobile magnate and one-time purveyor of the *Protocols*. “They fit with what is going on. They are sixteen years old, and they have fitted the world situation up to this time. They fit it now” (quoted in Baldwin 2001:160). For Ioann the *Protocols* are eighty years old and they fit what has happened up until his time with “shattering exactness.” This is critical for the divinatory discipline: the text must seem to match up with reality.

The text must be *made* to fit — it does not just happen naturally. That is, it has to be matched up with the circumstances by an interpreter. The interpreter must demonstrate how a proper reading and application of this sacred/secret text resolves the problem and makes it disappear (or at least makes it manageable). In his analysis of Kalanga divination, Richard Werbner (1973:1414) notes that the diviner and his congregation “have to persuade each other, through highly stylized language, that certain meanings fit together.” People will not be satisfied unless they feel that a particular interpretation “penetrates events . . . so as to reveal the occult significance of their own past and its implications for their future.” But this is always done in a competitive atmosphere. There are other experts to contend with, other readings, other texts. Providentialism, said Weber, transcends and therefore repudiates magical divination. Although the Puritans boasted an “array of pious techniques for divining the hidden patterns of the world,” they attacked expressions of “village” divination (Winship 1996:2). Elsewhere I have tried to show that the monastic authors of the *Primary Chronicle* advance providential interpretations of disastrous events *over against* those of the indigenous Slavic diviners (Bennett 2005).

In this connection, the situation of post-communist Russia raises some interesting questions. Conspiracy theories have flourished since the collapse of the U.S.S.R., but so has magic and divination. Reprints of pre-revolutionary fortune-telling books have been widely sold in kiosks and metro stations — sometimes the very same stalls that peddle the *Protocols*. Interest is high in astrology, ESP, UFOs, faith healing, and sundry other paranormal phenomena. *Soi-disant* wizards and clairvoyants abound in post-Soviet Russia. In 1996 philosophy/religion/occult was the top-selling category in the non-fiction book market (Lovell 2000:196, n. 54). Several observers have remarked on the fact that, despite their mutual hostility, there is a convergence in language and outlook between post-Soviet Orthodoxy and neo-pagan or New Age spirituality, both recognizing the power of mind control, the evil eye, and other esoteric technologies (Shenfield 2001; Borenstein 1999).

Does this far-flung interest in the occult (specifically, the belief in hidden powers) contribute to the fluorescence of conspiracy theories in Russia? Or should we look instead to the communist era? “If there is one thing that the Soviet regime managed to burn into virtually every brain,” writes Masha Gessen, “it is that a good theory, a really good idea can explain the world. The whole world with no exceptions save for those that prove the rule” (1997:70). Pipes (1997:114) asserts that many Russians

have voluntarily maintained the very conspiracism that had so long been imposed on them. This should not come as a complete surprise, for the former Soviet Union is the only place where the government sponsored conspiracy theories and endlessly repeated them on a daily basis for three generations.

Has their Soviet past predisposed Russians to be more willing conspiracy theorists, more eager readers of the *Protocols*?

Or are the roots to be found in the Christian tradition? Does the supposed “medieval” quality of contemporary Russian Orthodoxy, with its dualism and demonology, nourish conspiracism? Surely there is some evidence of this at least in the case of Ioann:

He saw Russian history in cosmic terms, and recognised little difference between the tenth century and the twentieth: both were equally present to him, and he interpreted both in terms of the eternal struggle between Russia and her enemies. (Slater 2000:316)

Or is it rather something to do with the very nature of providentialism? After all, providentialism and conspiracy theories are both stout traditions in America (Goldberg 2001). Of the theodicies enumerated by Weber, is it only providentialism, with its belief in an all-powerful personal deity acting behind the scenes of history, that leads to conspiracism? “When we attribute events to the actions of God,” acknowledges Martin Copenhaver (1994:811), “we claim belief in a kind of beneficent conspiracy theory, with God as the chief conspirator.” Is this the link between the circle and the ellipse? Do we not find home-grown conspiracy theories in the civilizational “footprint” of karma? We need comparative studies of the religious and regional varieties of conspiracy theory.

It is hoped that this wide-ranging presentation may have at least posed some relevant questions for further study, and to have contributed to an appreciation of the interconnections between divination, providentialism, and conspiracism.*

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Book Reviews

Religionswissenschaft als Kulturwissenschaft. By BURKHARD GLADIGOW. Herausgegeben von Christoph Auffarth und Jörg Rüpke. Stuttgart, Verlag W. Kohlhammer GmbH 2005. (Religionswissenschaft heute, Bd. 1). Pp. 301. ISBN 3–17–018873–9.

Zu Burkhard Gladigows 65. Geburtstag haben die Religionswissenschaftler Christoph Auffarth und Jörg Rüpke, beide Schüler des Geehrten, einen Band mit seinen wichtigsten, über eine Zeitspanne von fast dreissig Jahren verfassten Aufsätzen, herausgegeben. Gladigow kann als Meister der kleinen literarischen Form bezeichnet werden. Er hat eine Vielzahl von kleineren und grösseren Aufsätzen verfasst, auch die Zahl seiner Herausgeberschaften ist beeindruckend, allein die Monographie gehört nicht zu seinen bevorzugten Publikationsformen. Den beiden Herausgebern des vorliegenden Bandes kommt der Verdienst zu, eine Reihe von wichtigen Aufsätzen Gladigows in dieser Sammlung leicht zugänglich gemacht zu haben, angesichts der Bedeutung einiger der hier im Nachdruck vorgelegten Beiträge ein sehr lobenswertes Unterfangen.

Die hier zusammengestellten Beiträge von Burkhard Gladigow sind von den Herausgebern in fünf grosse Abschnitte unterteilt worden, die schon in den Überschriften die Bandbreite von Gladigows Forschung exemplifizieren. Der erste Abschnitt, „Religionswissenschaft im Kontext der Kulturwissenschaften“, umfasst drei programmatische Beiträge zur Verortung der Religionswissenschaft innerhalb der Kulturwissenschaften. In dem ersten der drei Aufsätze, „Mögliche Gegenstände und notwendige Quellen einer Religionsgeschichte“ (zuerst 1992 veröffentlicht), entfaltet Gladigow sein „kulturwissenschaftliches Modell“ einer Religionswissenschaft, die anknüpfend an Sabbatuccis Aufsatz „Kultur und Religion“ die Rückführung der Religion in die Kultur leisten soll. In den beiden folgenden Aufsätzen wird dieses Grundthema aufgegriffen und weiter ausdifferenziert. Hervorgehoben seien an dieser Stelle die Ausführungen Gladigows zu zwei wichtigen „Bezugswissenschaften“ der Religionswissenschaft, den Philologien und der Geschichtswissenschaft. Eine Re-Lektüre dieser Passagen hätte dem jüngst in der deutschen Religionswissenschaft wieder ausgebrochenen Grundsatzkonflikt zwischen „historisch-

philologisch“ und „sozialwissenschaftlich“ orientierter Forschung viel an Schärfe genommen. Zugleich sind die beiden Aufsätze Lehrstücke in der Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, eines Verhältnisses, das in den deutschsprachigen Ländern immer noch kontrovers diskutiert wird. Etwas ungeschickt durch das Herausgeberteam ist jedoch die Zusammenstellung gerade dieser drei Beiträge, da sie sich in weiten Teilen wörtlich wiederholen und dieser erste Abschnitt spätestens mit der Lektüre des dritten Beitrags redundant wirkt.

Die folgenden Abschnitte (II–IV) des Bandes sind Gladigows religionshistorischem Schwerpunkt gewidmet, den Religionen des alten Griechenlands und Roms. Im zweiten Abschnitt sind zum einen Beiträge versammelt, die jenseits des Textmediums das Bild in Form von Tempelkultbildern ins Zentrum religionswissenschaftlicher Analyse rücken, zum anderen leisten zwei Aufsätze grundsätzliche Überlegungen zu ekstatischen Phänomenen und zu Mythen, deren gemeinsame Schnittstelle ihr experimenteller Charakter darstellt. Die Aufsätze des dritten Abschnitts stellen Strukturfragen des Polytheismus und religiöser Pluralität in den Mittelpunkt, die sich nicht nur auf das antike Griechenland konzentrieren, sondern in eine religionsgeschichtliche Einordnung des „Polytheismus“ in der Moderne (und Postmoderne) münden. Besonders ist hier der Einbezug der nord-amerikanischen Debatte um den politischen Polytheismus hervorzuheben, die in der europäischen Diskussion weitgehend unbeachtet blieb.

Die Einholung der Religion in die Kultur wird im vierten Abschnitt, der kollektive Handlungsformen im Spannungsfeld von „Tod und Gewalt, Opfer und Heil“ analysiert, exemplarisch vorgeführt. Der hier wieder abgedruckte Aufsatz zur „Teilung des Opfers“ ist, obwohl 1984 erstmals erschienen, in seiner Komplexität und umfassenden Systematik wohl bis heute nicht übertroffen.

Der letzte im vierten Abschnitt abgedruckte Beitrag „Religion im Rahmen der theoretischen Biologie“ und die ersten beiden Beiträge im fünften Abschnitt „Wir gläubigen Physiker“ und „Pantheismus und Naturmystik“, beschäftigen sich mit einem Thema, auf das Gladigow gerade im letzten Jahrzehnt immer wieder zurückgekommen ist, und in dem sich die in seinen religionsgeschichtlichen und systematischen Einzeluntersuchungen gewonnenen Erkenntnisse gleichsam bündeln: Das durch die Aufklärung entstandene Spannungsverhältnis von Religion und Naturwissenschaften, das seit dem 18. Jahrhundert die europäische Religionsgeschichte mitbestimmt. Die Untersuchung der vielfältigen Interdependenzen der Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Religionsgeschichte in Europa mündet im Konzept einer europäischen Religionsgeschichte, die nicht nur die traditionellen religiösen

Traditionen, sondern gerade auch die aus den Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften gewonnenen Sinnstiftungen als Teil der europäischen Religionsgeschichte abzubilden vermag.

Dem Band ist ein ausführliches Vorwort der beiden Herausgeber vorangestellt, das u.a. eine kurze Biographie von Burkhard Gladigow enthält sowie eine ausführliche Bibliographie seiner bisher veröffentlichten Arbeiten. Die Freude an dem gut gelungenen Band schmälert ein wenig der leichte Unmut über ein unachtsames Lektorat, das sich in den schon obligatorischen Druckfehlern zeigt sowie in Dingen wie dem Mitlaufen der Kopfzeile zum Beitrag „Vergleich und Interesse“ über den gesamten nächsten Beitrag.

Eine letzte Bemerkung sei der Rezensentin gestattet, da dieser Sammelband mit Burkhard Gladigows wegweisenden Arbeiten zu einer Bestandsaufnahme seines Wirkens für die deutschsprachige Religionswissenschaft geradezu einlädt. Gladigow weist in seinem Aufsatz „Rigoristische Haltungen und kulturelle Rahmenbedingungen“ darauf hin, dass nur durch eine Erweiterung des Gegenstandsbereichs, im konkreten Fall durch den Einbezug „nicht-monotheistische[r] und vormoderne[r] Beispiele“, die systematische Reichweite und die Grenze religionswissenschaftlicher Analyse erkennbar seien. Diese Einsicht sollte auf seine eigenen Arbeiten angewandt werden. Die sehr interessanten systematischen Ergebnisse von Gladigows Arbeiten sind allzu oft nur auf die europäische Religionsgeschichte, aus der er seine empirischen Daten schöpft, anwendbar. Die Einschränkung des Gegenstandsbereichs führt Gladigow jedoch nicht zu einer Einschränkung seines eigenen systematischen Anspruchs. Dieser wird zum einen virulent in seinen komparatistischen Bemerkungen, z.B. zur Entwicklung der Seelenvorstellung (229). Auch fällt auf, dass er sich für diese komparatistischen „Ausflüge“ oft religionsphänomenologischer Materialsammlungen bedient, obwohl er sich der Problematik solch angehäuften Datenmaterials sicherlich bewusst ist. Der Detailgenauigkeit in seinem eigenen empirischen Bereich steht eine auffallende Ungenauigkeit in empirischen Bereichen, die er sich nur durch Sekundärliteratur erschliessen kann, gegenüber. Zum anderen charakterisiert er in seinem Konzept einer europäischen Religionsgeschichte nicht nur diese, sondern auch implizit (und hier in Defizienzkategorien) die „anderen“, aussereuropäischen Religionsgeschichten. Die Rezensentin würde sich wünschen, dass in den hoch ausdifferenzierten Ergebnissen, die Burkhard Gladigow für die europäische Religionsgeschichte vorlegt, nicht die Ergebnisse der noch zu schreibenden islamischen, buddhistischen oder asiatischen Religionsgeschichten vorweggenommen würden in dem Postulat eines europäischen „Sonderwegs“, der sich auszeichnet durch die Präsenz und Verfügbarkeit

unterschiedlicher „Religionen“, die nicht nur durch traditionelle Diffusions- und Enkulturationsprozesse, sondern auch über Philologien, Wissenschaften und Literatur ermöglicht wurden. Funktional parallele Prozesse liessen sich z.B. für die asiatische Religionsgeschichte nachweisen. Die Behauptung der Singularität europäischer Religionsgeschichte lässt sich nur in Unkenntnis aussereuropäischer Religionsgeschichten aufrechterhalten. Daher sollte der systematische Anspruch dem Gegenstandsbereich angemessen konsequent nur für Europa formuliert werden und keine Aussagen über andere Gegenstandsbereiche mittransportieren.

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Evil Incarnate. Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History. By DAVID FRANKFURTER. Princeton University Press 2006. Pp. 286. ISBN 0–691–11350–5.

In the second half of the 1980s and for more than a decade afterwards, rumors about satanic conspiracy reached outside their central arena among Evangelical Christians. They were taken seriously by secular “experts,” and were employed by everyone from journalists and police officers to therapists to make sense of troubling events and behavior.

In *Evil Incarnate*, David Frankfurter gives a thorough analysis of the phenomenon from the point of view of a historian of religions. His conclusions and recommendations are clear. History, he states, does not support the contentions of believers in evil, transgressive, “satanic” conspiracies. “[I]nstead of imagining that religion and the sacred might give rise to *every* conceivable act,” we should perhaps “start from the proposition that ritual itself can function as an organizing theme, a myth for *contemplating* Otherness, inversion, and evil” (213). This is his position, and the book demonstrates its utility clearly.

Cross-cultural and historical in scope, Frankfurter analyses six central dimensions involved in the construction of ideas and practices around the radical evil that was imagined in the Satanism scare. Starting with the observation that the demonic realm is often imagined as very orderly, he gives a brief historical analysis of the nature and function of demonologies. The ordering and transformation of local understandings of danger is then understood as the active innovations made by “certain self-defined experts, and also as the weapons of institutions” (31).

These two chapters establish that it is not only possible to understand the contemporary phenomenon through cross-cultural and historical comparison, but also that one may do so from within the technical vocabularies of history of religions. This is in itself both gratifying and enlightening, as the languages of sociology, criminology, and other social sciences have dominated the critical study of the Satanism scare.

In the fourth chapter, Frankfurter shifts to the stories, and addresses how evil conspiracies are imagined specifically as *religion*, and their monstrous deeds imagined as *ritual*. His analysis builds on previous articles, and should hold general interest for those within our discipline for several reasons. Generally, it is interesting to see how religion and ritual are employed as tools of the imagination of evil. Religion is imagined as inverted, and gives organization and perverted purpose to the alleged evil activities. Rituals are imagined to “bind the malevolent community” (120) and serve as a source of the con-

spiracy's power. This treatment of religion and ritual also holds interest for another reason: historians of religions have often fallen into the same erroneous thought driving the popular imagination of cults of evil. Hypothetical actions have been allowed to stand in for, and partially been privileged over, actual empirical investigations. This subject is treated briefly, but importantly, in his final chapter.

Interpreting and explaining stories and activities, Frankfurter takes us far away and long ago. He also takes the reader through a lot of different ground with regard to the subjects of analysis, and thus he also produces and uses many different theoretical perspectives. Largely, they work very well together, and I applaud his use of different levels of analysis. I agree that we need to combine theories from different fields and attend to individual psychology as well as socio-political elements in our analysis. I am, however, not as certain as he is of the usefulness of psychodynamic theories in explaining what he calls "primary process fantasy" (143). Being generally unconvinced that psychodynamic theories and their concepts have much scientific validity, I remain skeptical after having read Frankfurter's — admittedly elegant — use of them in trying to explain ideational content of demonological fantasies.

It does, however, make for fascinating reading. That goes for the book as a whole. Having worked in the same field for a number of years, I still found it enlightening. In addition to his chapter on "rites of evil," I was particularly taken with his ritual analysis of the performance of evil. Again eschewing the vocabularies of other fields, Frankfurter re-analyses "ostensive actions" in the terminology of *performance*. Dividing up the performances into direct and indirect mimetic performance, he manages to convey a fuller picture of the interaction inherent in different role-takings than I have seen outside the best of social psychology, and complementing such analyses beautifully. This focus on the dialectic of performance also adds to his analysis of how the fight against evil conspiracies has ended up legitimating and motivating a whole range of atrocities. Indeed, as the whole of research on witch-crazes and satanic ritual abuse has shown: "Historically verifiable atrocities take place not in the ceremonies of some evil realm or as expressions of some ontological evil force, but rather in the course of *purging* evil and its alleged devotees from the world" (224). That makes books such as *Evil Incarnate* more than engrossing — it is important.

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Embracing the Dark. The Magic Order of the Dragon Rouge — Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making. By KENNET GRANHOLM. Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag — Åbo Akademi University Press 2005. Pp. xv + 347. ISBN 951-765-251-8.

The Dragon Rouge is an occultist organization created in Sweden in 1990 by Thomas Karlsson, then little more than a teen-ager who had been reading esoteric literature and had probably been in contact with groups of persons interested in the same subjects. The organization may have had the same sort that countless similar groups have had in Europe and the USA since the 1960s, and especially in the last twenty years. Mostly composed by young men and women attracted by the mysterious lure of the “occult,” who would spontaneously join together in order to give a communal dimension to their interests, it would have been confined to a local dimension and would have probably died out once most of the members had grown up to a more mature age. But things went differently with the Dragon Rouge. On the one hand Karlsson showed obvious abilities as a leader, organizer, and theoretician of the group; on the other there were some fortunate circumstances that helped the organization not only to establish itself steadily in Sweden, but even to extend its influence across the borders of its homeland. This materialised when, in the mid-1990s, a spell of satanic scare struck Sweden. Some Swedish media came across the name of the group and, linking it to Satanism, began to present hostile accounts of its doings. Predictably, the negative reports did nothing but enhance the curiosity for, and consequently the popularity of, the order. All of a sudden, the Dragon Rouge experienced a massive increase in its membership (500 at its peak), which at first even created some problems of management for the leadership. After the media tsunami subsided, the group reorganized itself over a new basis, began to produce a consistent corpus of rituals and teachings, and expanded abroad.

Granholm’s book is actually a Ph.D. dissertation. As is the custom in Finland and in other Scandinavian countries, the dissertation has been published by the local University Press on the occasion of its defence. In the book Granholm presents the first comprehensive account of the history, the structure, the teachings, and the ideology of the order. Moreover, Granholm has not only studied the group from the outside. As has become an accepted practice in the study of New Religious Movements, he has included participant observation among his methods of research. He has therefore joined the group, and the ceremony of his initiation is one of the rituals described in the book. Even if, judging from his own account, he has not advanced very far in the initiatic structure of the order; he has nevertheless spent a great amount of time, over

a period of more than two years, meeting other members and attending courses and ceremonies. This has given him the possibility to build up a unique insight into the workings of the group.

The book is divided into eight chapters. The first one contains a thematic and methodological introduction. Here Granholm discusses at length the research area, the “insider terminology” used throughout the book, and the sources he has gathered during his observation of the group (interviews of members, questionnaires, etc.). Of particular interest is the definition of Left Hand Path (LHP) as a specific way “of relating to and approaching the numinous” (27). Granholm makes it clear that this concept is important in order to understand the identity and the ideology of the group. According to the Dragon Rouge members, the LHP differs from a “Right Hand Path” (pursued by more “mainstream” organizations) because it focuses on “chaos, darkness and freedom,” instead of “order, light and restriction” (28). This explains why the Dragon Rouge prefers to define its ritual practices as “Dark Magic” (opposed to what is defined as a less interesting “Light Magic”: 26).

The same chapter also includes a final section where the author “positions himself.” Granholm honestly admits that, although he has never been attracted by the practical aspects of occultism, “the worldview and the people I have come across during my research represent something compelling to me” (59), and that his interest for the organization is also “personal” (*ibid.*).

With the following chapter Granholm begins the “descriptive” part of his work, by offering an overview of the historical background of the group, both with respect to the history of esotericism in general, and more particularly to those currents, such as occultism and neopaganism, that are essential for understanding the underlying ideology and the formal structure of the Dragon Rouge. Aleister Crowley, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and Kenneth Grant are, among others, opportunely referred to as models and direct sources for the Dragon Rouge. However, one would also expect to find here some references to organized Satanism, with which Dragon Rouge seems to share a certain “air de famille.” Surprisingly enough, Granholm refers to satanic groups only very briefly in discussing the “alternative spiritual milieu” in Sweden (110–111). We will get back to this point later on.

In the following three chapters Granholm offers a multi-layered description of the order focusing on three main aspects: its ideological and philosophical tenets as they are expressed in its official documents; the organizational and initiatic structure (which also includes a profile of the founder, Thomas Karlsson, and a summary of the main events in the history of the order); and, finally, its ritual practices. Granholm’s description of the rituals of the Dragon Rouge is mainly based on his own experiences as participant-observer. This is

particularly helpful, because Granholm explains that, unlike many other such organizations, most of the Dragon Rouge rituals are adapted, if not entirely composed, for specific occasions, and have not been fixed into a rigid canon. It would not be easy to have a clear idea of how they are performed without actually participating in them.

Finally, in the last two chapters before the conclusion, Granholm analyses the “discursive strategies” of the Dragon Rouge, that is to say the ways in which its members “make sense” (Granholm defines it the “meaning making” aspect) of their ideas and their activities in the organization. He discusses at first the main methodological issues related to discourse analysis, which he applies to the results of his field-research. He identifies then, mostly on the basis of his interviews with the members, six main discourses: 1) Magic as an all-encompassing activity; 2) “Self-evolvement” as the main goal of magic; 3) Individuality; 4) Magic as a very demanding commitment; 5) Nature; and 6) Women’s rights. This is surely one of the most interesting parts of the book, because it gives the reader an important insight into the way of thinking of the persons belonging to this kind of organisation.

Considering also the information Granholm gives on the rituals and the areas of interest of the order, one realizes that the Dragon Rouge has a well defined identity, which presents analogies with other occultist groups and movements (both existing and defunct), but combines elements taken from them in its own peculiar way. For instance, if the interest for the so-called “dark” aspects of Kabbalah and for Tantrism shows the influence of authors such as Kenneth Grant and places the Dragon Rouge in the context of post-Crowleyan developments, the importance of runology and the frequent references to the gods of the Germanic pantheon points brings it closer to Odinic neopaganism and Ásatrú. Other aspects, such as the insistence on the equality of rights for men and women are particularly significant in other forms of neopaganism, such as Wicca and the Goddess movement. On the other hand, the insistence on magic as a path leading to, or developing, a higher self and as a demanding, all-encompassing activity runs through the whole history of occultism.

Granholm’s book is a welcome contribution for two main reasons. The first one is that it makes a vast amount of information available on an occultist organization that has acquired an international dimension and that was yet, before this book, virtually unknown outside of Sweden, even by specialists. It appears that Scandinavian countries have been a fertile ground for the development of occultist and neopagan movements, and it is therefore important to know more about them. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, this research on the Dragon Rouge has a value as a case study, for what it tells us

about the functioning of a group of this kind. In this perspective, the results of this study may be used as a paradigm for understanding organized occultism as a particular phenomenon of contemporary religion. But it should also be remembered that this is not the first research on occultist organizations based on participant observation. In fact, at least two other important books have preceded Granholm's in this direction: William Sims Bainbridge's *Satan's Power* (1978), and Tanya M. Luhmann's *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* (1989). Perhaps Granholm, who is very diligent in discussing the methodological and theoretical literature that is relevant for his study, would have profited from taking them into account, especially as they are nowadays considered by many scholars as classics in this field. The concept of "interpretive drift" in particular, introduced by T.M. Luhmann in her work, explains how a "magical" worldview can exist and resist in the secularised, urbanized, highly educated social setting typical of this kind of movements (and in whose respect the Dragon Rouge is no exception). This concept would have been perhaps useful in addressing, as Granholm does, the problem of "meaning making" in the context of this particular occultist organization.

This work is obviously the result of years of painstaking research. However, one may easily have the impression that it also suffers from not having undergone the full editorial process that transforms a doctoral dissertation into a book. Repetitions and typos abound, and some of the methodological and theoretical parts, perhaps a bit too didactic, might have been shortened or summarised without doing too much harm to the solidity of the work. But the most striking example of this need for further editorial work is given by the quotations Granholm gives from his interviews with the members of the order. They feature mostly in the seventh chapter and are essential for understanding the "meaning making" level of Granholm's analysis. Yet, it is sometimes hard to make any meaning at all from the English translation of these interviews. One can understand the intention of rendering both the literal meaning and the colloquial tone of the original, but perhaps a bit of editing would have been useful (even more so as the Swedish version is given in the footnotes anyway). To give one example, here is a member expressing his ideas on magic: "Light magic, is more related to religion as I see it because there is a desire to, leave things in the hands of I mean that one views, cosmos, and existence, like, things, how should one put it, that there are, laws and there are obviously laws but the dark magician and the light magician view these laws differently" (262).

It is also to be mentioned that, on some occasions, the author does not seem to rely on the best scientific literature available on the subjects he discusses. This is the case with his overview of the esoteric currents that form the historical background of the Dragon Rouge. If Granholm shows a good familiarity

with the recent methodological debates in this field, his knowledge of the history of these currents appears at times to be shaky, as when he attributes *The Magus* (a handbook of practical magic published in 1801) to Frances (sic) Bacon (!) instead of Francis Barrett. The same goes when Granholm deals with Tantrism, which he considers as a very important source of inspiration for the members of the Dragon Rouge (35–36). Granholm here only refers to Julius Evola, Arthur Avalon, and Benjamin Walker as authorities, and seems to ignore altogether the works of renowned specialists such as David Gordon White, André Padoux, and Hugh B. Urban.

One last remark concerns the attitude of the author towards the subject of his work. Several authors, including Granholm's predecessors Bainbridge and Luhrmann, have discussed the methodological problems involved in participant observation as a tool for research. It is obviously difficult to develop a close personal relationship with a relatively small group of persons over a long period of time, and at the same time keep the necessary distance as a scholar. The impression one gets in reading Granholm's book is that he has sometimes kept himself a bit too close to his subject. There are for instance some concepts, such as the "Left Hand Path" (arguably the most important one in the whole book), which seem to be used only in an emic, descriptive sense, without trying to contextualise them on a theoretical level. The members of the order use this concept in order to build up their own identity, and they include in the opposite category of "Right Hand Path" all other neopagan and occultist movements. To what extent should this "discursive strategy" be used not only by the members of the Dragon Rouge, but also by the scholar who is studying them? The descriptive level can hardly suffice here, and one would like to know if this opposition between these two "paths" makes sense also from an etic point of view. On the other hand, one wonders if the absence of a discussion on organised Satanism, which would have been particularly relevant in this context, may not be motivated by the desire of distancing the Dragon Rouge from any connection with this particular current. We have seen how the Dragon Rouge, in the early period of its history, was the target of attacks from the Swedish media on the basis of this presumption. However, even if the Dragon Rouge properly speaking cannot be defined as a Satanist organization, there are some analogies and some common elements which should attract the attention and the curiosity of the scholar and which one would have liked to find addressed in the book. Another surprising aspect of the picture of the Dragon Rouge given in the book is that there are practically no hints at conflicts or problematic situations between the members either in the history or in the current functioning of the order. This may be a perfectly genuine image, but the history of occultism (confirmed on this point by the

ethnographic accounts of both Bainbridge and Luhrmann) shows how frequent and disruptive these situations of conflict can be in this context, and how revelatory they can be for understanding the functioning, for instance, of charismatic leadership.

Despite the problematic aspects that have been highlighted here, Granholm is to be congratulated for taking up the difficult task of studying such an organization. His book can be considered as a useful source of information for those who want to know more about some aspects of contemporary religion that are far from being marginal. Western esotericism has been studied so far mostly by historians. The fact that sociologists are willing to offer their contribution for the understanding of this complex phenomenon can only be welcomed as a very positive development in this field of research.

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Localizing Paradise: Kumano Pilgrimage and the Religious Landscape of Pre-modern Japan. By D. MAX MOERMAN. Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard East Asian Monographs 235, Harvard University Asia Center 2005. Pp. 297. ISBN 0-674-01395-6. Hardcover. USD 42.50.

In his monograph on an ancient Japanese pilgrimage centre — a set of three shrines on the Kii peninsula collectively called Kumano sanzan — D. Max Moerman sets out to investigate all possible angles of the centre as both a real and an ideal place in the religious landscape of premodern Japan. He looks at “Kumano” with Michel Foucault’s notion of *heterotopias* in mind, i.e. places or sites that “at once represent, contest, and invert others” (2). Other theoretical considerations include Allan Grapard’s “call to ‘study Japanese religions *in situ*’” and Jacques Le Goff’s approach to “spatialization of thought” from Le Goff’s comprehensive study of the place of purgatory in medieval Christianity, here in terms of looking at “the relationships between society and cosmology in a premodern religious culture.” (4) Moerman aims at providing new material for comparative studies of other pilgrimage sites and the social construction of a religious landscape. (5)

The example of Kumano is well chosen since few sites in Japan provide the scholar of premodern Japanese religions with such rich and comprehensive material on combined Shintō-Buddhist beliefs and practices including pilgrimage and connected rituals, gender roles and issues of community-building at and around the site, medieval cosmological images as well as soteriological and doctrinal discourses. Whereas these different aspects of Kumano have been looked at before in various studies, Moerman explores the different but to him intricately connected “fields” of the textual, the artistic, and the ritual (1), covering a period roughly from the 8th to the early 17th centuries. The sources under investigation cover a wide range from textual documents such as travel itineraries, diaries of medieval pilgrims, poetic renditions to painted images of the site. Of the extant paintings, a 16th version of the *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* from the late medieval and early modern genre of Japanese pilgrimage “mandalas,” holds a central position in the book.

Moerman divides his book into five chapters and concludes with a short section he calls “An Ambivalent Utopia” aptly pointing to the results of his in-depth study of this complex topic. The monograph is complete with a bibliography, character list, index and illustrations (thirty-one black and white pictures dispersed throughout the main text showing maps, natural landscape and paintings; ten colour plates in insert).

Chapter 1, “Situating Kumano,” serves as an introduction to the entire book and is, as all other chapters, divided into several subsections. Moerman

claims to not intend to provide an institutional history, however, his treatment of the subject in this first chapters does follow a roughly chronological presentation of records on Kumano as an emerging institution, citing mainly from descriptions of pilgrimages in travel diaries and drawing the reader of this subsection into the daily lives and adventures of devout early medieval Japanese pilgrims. Institutional history is certainly a necessary part of the overall study of Kumano pilgrimage and obviously intended to set the stage for further explorations. In the latter part of Chapter 1, Moerman introduces a device he feels will serve to structure the remaining chapters: the map-like and intensely detailed *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* painting. He is aware that this means that he would take the role of a late medieval picture explainer such as a Kumano nun, or Kumano *bikuni*, who travelled through Japan using the *Mandala* painting as a prop for her propagations and storytelling. Of course, Moerman disclaims this thought of morphing into a Kumano nun by stating that he, in opposition to the medieval picture explainer, looks “to such paintings for what they conceal as well as for what they reveal” (41) because he feels the *Mandala* overlooks disparate views of different groups or individuals: the ascetic (treated in Chapter 3), the ex-emperor and members of his court (Chapter 4) and women (Chapter 5).

Chapter 2, “Emplacements,” is intended to provide the wider historical background of the study in preparation for Chapters 3 to 5 and explores the imagery of Kumano in general and images of Kumano including the *Mandala* in particular. It seeks to uncover composite meanings of the available textual sources — early myths, local legends, foundation accounts and Buddhist hagiographies — especially as to the definition of Kumano in Buddhist terms. The site was seen as a realm of Buddhas and bodhisattvas who came to overlay, but in no way replace, the local, pre-Buddhist deities. Important representations of this fascinating process in premodern Japan are the various “mandala” paintings of which the so-called Kumano mandalas form a distinctive class. They “present a topography far less abstract” than the traditional Tantric and Pure Land iconographic representations of Buddhist cosmology by bringing the cosmology “down to earth”, so that the “heavenly reward” promised becomes directly accessible to the worshipper of the Kumano mandala (90). As a result, Moerman takes the consideration of Japanese Buddhist images into the realm of ritual studies since they form part of ascetic cults that may have served as abbreviated pilgrimages to the Kumano sanctuaries.

After having thus asserted the importance of the Kumano images for the subject under consideration, Moerman invites the reader to join the perspective of the three groups of worshippers mentioned above. The following three

book chapters each literally take “selective scenes from the *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* as its point of departure” (37).

Chapter 3, “Mortuary Practices”, takes up narrative scenes from the *Mandala* that show the “extreme but rare rite performed by an elite group of religious professionals” (92), the *Fudaraku tokai* (crossing the ocean to the Potalaka paradise) ceremony of ritual suicide by drowning in the sea, and secondly the lay pilgrim’s journey on the Kumano pilgrimage circuit. Both share “a similar logic and a common vocabulary based on the link between enlightenment and death.” (93) In uncovering the “wider semantic and ritual field” of the passage to Fudaraku, one of the Buddhist Pure Lands, Moerman searches for meanings by making extensive use of 16th century Jesuit accounts and works by folklorists such as Horii Ichirō, Yanagita Kunio and Cornelius Ouwehand.

Chapter 4, “The Theater of the State”, continues to use metaphors such as “stage,” “theatre,” “pageantry” and “arena” where ideological strategies are enacted and rituals performed. The key scene in the *Mandala* offers a view of an “idealized image” (142) of Kumano pilgrimages undertaken by the often extremely powerful abdicated sovereigns, their consorts and numerous retinues during the Insei period (1086–1221 CE). Moerman argues that these enormous undertakings were both “possible and necessary” (148) because the retired — and ordained — monarchs used them to underscore their new position of power as “dharma kings”. Therefore, Kumano pilgrimage in this instance seemed to have enforced social difference and did not generally homogenise the members of the *communitas* of pilgrims as stated by Victor and Edith Turner in their study of pilgrimage in Christian culture (149). Moerman then describes the role the armed forces of the three Kumano shrines played in medieval warfare, and the various activities of the abdicated sovereigns with respect to casting themselves as dharmic rulers over a divine land.

Chapter 5, “A Women’s Place,” looks at figures of female visitors to Kumano that appear in various scenes in the *Mandala* and related paintings. Moerman examines meanings that the site held for women and as in the preceding chapters explores the historical and religious contexts. Buddhological discourses on the salvation of women and a “larger religious discourse on female sexuality” (182) are scrutinised. Usually, women were denied access to sacred sites because of their impure bodies spiritually defiled by menstrual and parturitional blood. Kumano was exceptional in allowing women to enter. The Kumano site was “marked by both an absence and an inversion” of the boundary excluding women. To cross the boundary of the Nachi shrine, i.e., literally crossing the Otonashi river, however was an act of purification (196) enabling the women to enter the sacred grounds. The Kumano nuns who all had their

institutional base in Nachi, addressed the needs of medieval women by preaching to them about possibilities and rituals ensuring their salvation, e.g., from the (menstrual) blood pool hell. Moerman looks closely at the documentary and visual material the nuns used, and concludes that, ultimately, the Kumano nuns perpetuated the discourse of women's abjection as impure and sinful (230) by offering means of deliverance from hells designed for women.

In the final conclusion Moerman addresses his reluctance to interpret Kumano simply as a utopia. Because of the tensions and struggles "between rival claims of meaning and value" (234) it was a utopia only for some but a dystopia for others. "Reading against the mandala's totalizing claims" he emphasises the plural and ambiguous nature of Kumano pilgrimage at a continually contested site.

The strength of the book lies definitely in its lucid account of a highly complex subject matter. Moerman's explanations contain a good amount of creative language application. To name but a few that I particularly liked: he understands the *Lotus Sutra* as a "master narrative within the elite culture of the Heian court" that also "served as the armature for historiography" (49); Tōdaiji was a "hub of a national system of provincial temples and its statue of the cosmic Buddha stood as the symbolic center of this galactic polity" (177); the Buddha's disciple Śāriputra was "ever the Hīnayāna strawman" (188).

Also outstanding is Moerman's exemplary use of a vast range of sources. He generally works very conscientiously with his sources without putting forth speculative claims.

This lucidity is somewhat dimmed by inconsistencies in the transcriptions of Japanese terms in the main text and in the character list. Whereas a few inconsistencies may be permissible, the amount of irritating mistakes makes Moerman's study unfortunately seem unreliable in parts.

Another, probably more technical, problem lies in the disappointing quality of some of the black and white as well as colour illustrations showing paintings or details of paintings. Figures 3.3–3.7 for instance are all details from *Nachi Pilgrimage Mandala* paintings, well chosen for their illustrative support of important points in the text, but their general fuzziness contrasts starkly with the author's excellent intention.

The intended audience is certainly scholars and advanced students of (Asian) religions possibly but by no means necessarily with some proficiency in Japanese. Generally, the first mention of a Japanese term is coupled with a carefully chosen equivalent in English, but as Moerman prefers to use the transcribed Japanese term and only in few cases the English one, some passages may be not that accessible to readers without any knowledge of Japanese. Scholars of religions will find introductory sections useful such as the ones on *mandala*

and *mandara* (77 ff.), Buddhist kingship (173 ff.) or Buddhist tensions between natal (uterine) and monastic (patriarchial) lineages (225 ff.).

Overall, D. Max Moerman's *Localizing Paradise* is a masterful synopsis of meanings and subtexts defining the different fields of Kumano pilgrimage and premodern Japanese religions. Despite some irregularities in the transcription of Japanese terms and inconsistencies in regard to the main text and the character list, there is no doubt that the book is indeed a fine example of a — to stay with Michel Foucault — *heterotopology*: a study of places that incorporate plural and ambivalent connotations and views. Kumano was a place that enticed an ascetic to embark on a journey to enter paradise by ritually leaving one's life and a lay pilgrim to obtain benefits such as healing and good fortune in this life or to seek salvation from horrific hells. Moerman provides insights into the motivations of the pilgrimages of abdicated sovereigns that at the same time put a tremendous burden on the local populace on the Kii peninsula for nearly two hundred years. No doubt, the meanings given to Kumano by various groups differed vastly from each other. Moerman's vivid descriptions of these different images of Kumano and the in-depth analysis of the historical contexts make this book a stepping stone for comparative studies of other (Asian) pilgrimage sites and premodern religions.

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Reconnecting People and Healing the Land: Inuit Pentecostal and Evangelical Movements in the Canadian Eastern Arctic

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Abstract

In this paper we focus on Pentecostal and Evangelical movements in Nunavik and Nunavut. Although these movements are quite modern, they combine old and new features in a variety of ways. First we present a brief overview of the most important movements and their history. Then we examine in more detail recent developments, notably the case of the healing the land rituals developed by the Canada Awakening Ministries with the collaboration of a group from Fiji. Finally we discuss some of the basic patterns characterizing these new Christian movements and explore to what extent structural patterns can be discerned in these movements. They claim to introduce discontinuity with the past as well as new forms of solidarity integrating modern ideologies in a Christian perspective, but we will see that the relation to land as well as connections to shamanism remain central issues in modern Inuit discourses and practices of Pentecostalism.

Keywords

Inuit, Pentecostal, Evangelical, healing, land, rituals, religious movements

Introduction¹

Inuit religious movements are not a recent phenomenon. After Christianity was introduced in the Canadian Eastern Arctic at the end of the

¹ We wish to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada

19th century, many leaders and shamans started their own religious movements (Blaisel, Laugrand, Oosten 1999). These movements were usually repressed by local and governmental agencies. Inuit soon perceived that shamanism and Christianity did not go together. The context of Christianity still provided scope for the combination of new and old traditions. Suluk's movement in Arviat in the 1940s and Armand Tagoon's church in Qamanittuaq in the 1970s testify to the creativity of Inuit developing their own forms of Christianity. Since the early 1970s, the rapid development of Pentecostal and Evangelical movements has given a new dynamics to Inuit Christianity.²

In this paper we focus our analysis on these contemporary forms of Inuit religiosity. We explore the development of Evangelical and Pentecostal movements in the Canadian Eastern Arctic, i.e., in Nunavik (Northern Québec) and Nunavut, focusing on the views of the participants and their practises (see Oosten 2005). Although these movements are quite modern, they shape old and new features in a variety of ways. They claim to introduce discontinuity with the past as well as new forms of solidarity integrating modern ideologies in a Christian perspective. They claim to heal society providing space and context for the preservation of local views, models, and practises in a Christian framework. We will see that the relation to land as well as connections to shamanism remain central issues in contemporary Inuit discourses and forms of Pentecostalism.

Although most of the new religious movements strongly oppose shamanic traditions, some practices evoke these very traditions, especially to elders who have witnessed shamanic practices in the past. How can such a perception be explained? How do these new movements integrate Christianity and traditional beliefs today? We do not wish reduce these movements to a modern and capitalistic ideology in a Weberian perspective but instead focus on problems of transition and transfor-

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² Studies of Inuit Pentecostalism in Nunavik are rare. Some information is provided by Dorais 2001; 1997, and Fletcher and Kirmayer 1997. Stuckenberg 2005 provides a case study of the Pentecostal movement in Broughton Island.

mation. How do Pentecostal and Evangelical movements manage to preserve that which they break from, to use an expression from Robbins (2004:5)?³

In the first part of the paper we present a brief overview of some of the most important movements and their history. Then we examine in more detail recent developments, notably the case of the healing the land rituals developed by the Canada Awakening Ministries with the collaboration of a group from Fiji, and finally we discuss some of the basic patterns characterizing these new Christian movements and explore to what extent structural patterns can be discerned.

Our approach integrates data from different Inuit communities. Some data come from participant observation and from interviews with elders and Pentecostal adherents that were conducted in Rankin Inlet, Arviat and Baker Lake. Other data come from the internet where Evangelical groups are strongly present and visible, giving free access to rich material on new rituals performed in the last five years. These rituals provide a modern religious and political framework for healing by connecting people to the land as well as to the past.

Anglican, Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches

Anglicanism is the oldest Christian tradition in the Canadian Eastern Arctic. Introduced in 1876 on the East coast of Hudson Bay, in Nunavik, it developed more extensively on the West coast of the Hudson Bay after 1883 and on Baffin Island, after 1894.

In Nunavik and Nunavut, Anglican missions spread from the South to the North. Bibles and hymns books were traded in the fur trading posts, and the regenerative model of conversion was easily grasped by the Inuit. The belief in the life giving power of the Holy Spirit which is now so marked in Pentecostalism was already very present in the old Anglican traditions. The first letters sent by Inuit to their missionaries

³ According to Robbins, Pentecostal and Evangelical relationships with traditional cultures are marked by both rejection and preservation. Our paper contributes to this debate that has especially developed among Africanists (see Mary 1999; Laurent 2003). For books on Pentecostal movements see for example Corten 1995; Coleman 2000; Freston 2001. Willaime 1999 and Robbins 2004 provide excellent overviews of the extensive literature on these movements.

at the beginning of the 20th century often refer to the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit as well as Christian prayer. Thus one of the first converted woman from Baffin Island, Maria Aaraniq, wrote: “I expect the Holy Ghost to stand by us and guide our hands, and give us life.” The first native pastor in Baffin Island, Peter Tulugarjuaq stated: “The Holy Ghost is in our souls, it is helping us to believe.” And others added: “God will ask the Holy Ghost to enter our souls. We want to do that because Jesus will come again” (Laugrand, Oosten and Kakkik 2003:42, 76, 114). Anglican and Evangelical churches also share similar objectives in the promotion of a native ministry. Some of the new evangelical movements are thus quite close to the old “Native Church Policy” introduced more than a hundred years ago by the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

The continuity and consistency of the old Anglican traditions introduced by the first missionaries and the new religious movements is well illustrated by an Evangelical video film *Transformations*, in which the Sentinel Group presents a spirituality that promotes transformation through the Gospel and through a direct contact with God and the Holy Spirit. It presents an interview with Joan Turner, the wife of the famous Canon John Hudspith Turner who founded the first Anglican mission in Pond Inlet in 1929. Joan Turner relates a vision she had about Inuit singing hymns and gathering together for prayer. The Evangelical events on the tape are presented as a tangible proof of the second visitation of the Holy Spirit in northern communities.

The film also refers to the Inuit conversion rituals known as *siqqitir-niq* and practised in the early 1920s, when Christian ideas were adopted by local leaders and shamans (see Laugrand 2002; Oosten and Laugrand 1999). At the beginning of the videotape, the story of Angutijjuaq’s conversion is presented by one of his descendants, Joanasi Benjamin Arreak. Arreak explains how, almost a hundred years ago, Angutijjuaq decided to convert after a vision and a dream. He caught a seal at an *aglu*, the breathing hole of a seal, after a bright light appeared with three winged beings. The *aglu* where a hunter killed the sea game that allowed the camp to survive always was a point of connection. The appearance of three angels at such a crucial place resulting in a successful kill, laid a solid foundation to embed the relationships between hunter and prey in a Christian framework.⁴

⁴ See also Laugrand 2002:448–449 for Angutijjuaq’s conversion.

In many respects Inuit Pentecostalism shares important features with old Inuit forms of shamanic and Christian traditions. Inuit contemporary Pentecostalism can thus be viewed as a further development of ideas that were already familiar to the Inuit. Like earlier Protestant traditions, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism stress the authority of the Scriptures and present conversion as an individual decision with powerful effects on body and mind. Converts are referred to as “born again” and collective conversion movements as “religious awakening.”⁵

In the Canadian Eastern Arctic, the emergence of evangelical movements can be dated to the 1950s but it was only in the 1970s that these movements became more structured. At first, Pentecostal followers were often disillusioned members of other churches. Bastian (1994) asserts that Pentecostalism sometimes appears as a kind of substitute model for other churches,⁶ but such an interpretation cannot be maintained for the Inuit. Pentecostal and Evangelical movements have their own dynamics and capacities to attract people.

Today, a few groups are well structured. In Nunavik a veteran aviator, John Spillenaar and his wife Tyyne started one of the first evangelical movements, the Arctic Mission Outreach Trust Fund. On his website (arcticmissions.com), Spillenaar states that since 1950 they have founded two more ministries to the north and built five churches. This movement is financed by various churches, denominations and private agents. Arctic Mission Outreach Trust Fund involves many Inuit pastors such as James and Loie Arreak from Iqaluit, Billy Arnaquq from Qikirtarjuaq, and Eva and Bobby Deer from Quaqaq, Nunavik.

Conversion is described as an experience of a complete transformation. Miracles are quite often mentioned and serve as proofs of the power of transformation. Pastor David Ellyatt recalls the story of Peter Airo:

Peter Airo was sent home to die with cancer in 1982, after which he received the Lord as his personal Savior and was healed. Last year he died twice in the hospital

⁵ In the Arctic, this notion of “religious awakening” already appeared among Moravian missionaries in Labrador who used it to refer to a collective conversion movement in that area between 1779 and 1804.

⁶ In Igloodik, for instance, the first followers of the Pentecostal church were mainly former Catholics (Saladin d’Anglure 1991). In Quaqaq, they came from the Anglican church (Dorais 1997:263; 2001:76).

in Montreal and had a wonderful visitation in heaven which he is sharing across the North. Pastor Niki is 73 years old and going strong. (Ellyatt 2006)

On the West coast of Hudson Bay, the first Evangelical church was the Alliance church led by missionary Gleason Ledyard who was affiliated to the Christian and Missionary Alliance, an American evangelical group close to the Billy Graham network. Ledyard became a pilot and began to visit the Inuit of Maguse River with his wife Kathryn. In 1946 he established a mission in Arviat and travelled extensively to the Inuit camps with his small plane. The Ledyards spent about fifteen years in this area. They opened a school in the tundra and worked on translations of the Bible. Their work was continued by Inuit such as Mark Kalluak, who translated the *New Life Testament* in 1984, and more recently Luke Suluk, son of the famous religious leader of the same name. In a religious service we attended in October 2005, the Arviat Alliance church was very open and egalitarian, emphasizing participation by the audience. The pastor invited all participants to take the floor, to participate in singing and to play a spontaneous and active role in the service.

This movement sometimes evokes some shamanic features. An account of the conversion of Thomas Kutluk, a follower of that church, is quite instructive and evokes shamanic initiation in the water (see also Rasmussen 1929:120):

One day in the spring of 1983 I went with a group of men and our dog teams out to the flow edge on the Hudson Bay. . . . The dogs, lacking experience, ran directly into the open water, pulling the sleigh in behind them. I could not swim, but somehow I managed to get to the ice's edge where I hung on with my elbows. The water current was so strong that I was being pulled under the ice. With my body tilted and my face toward heaven I cried out to God. I had no words, just a voice from deep within me, a desperate cry to the Lord God. At that moment the Lord touched my heart. Suddenly I remembered my father telling me, 'If you ever fall in the water, hang onto the ice and kick your feet.' Just two strong kicks and I lay on top of the ice. I was so happy. I was thanking and praying God. My dogs also made it onto the ice, and with a change of clothing from one of the other men I was able to make the one-hour trip back to the settlement and home. . . . I continue to rejoice in God's goodness in sparing my physical life but especially for His goodness in restoring my spiritual life. (Kutluk 1985:7)

The immersion into water, the prayer, and the change of clothing mark the conversion of Kutluk. Salumi Qalasiq, a member of the Pentecostal

group from Rankin Inlet, described how she was saved by prayer when she fell into the water:

I remembered my father telling me that if I ever became desperate to think of him. I told myself I shouldn't think of him and instead I started to pray to Jesus. The surface of the lake seemed far away, but I started going upwards and got out of the hole I had fallen into. When I got to the surface, I started praying again. It seemed as though something underneath me had lifted me up. I ended up on top of the ice. It seemed as if I was very light, even though the clothing I wore was soaked which should have made me heavy, and I was wearing boots that were full of water. When I got out I was totally dry, even though I had been down at the bottom of the lake for a while. I was really amazed at this. I think my prayer was heard then. When I started going up from the bottom of the lake, it didn't take me any time at all. When I was at the bottom of the lake, I had no idea where I was supposed to surface, yet I managed to surface right at the hole.

I'm a bit fat, I'm not that light. It seemed that I was being pushed by something beneath me. As soon as I got out, I touched my clothing because I thought I was soaked, but my clothing was completely dry. This is an experience that I had personally that really amazed me. ... After I talked about it I realized that I had been helped. To this day, I believe I was helped. (Kolb and Law 2001:96–97)

Another Evangelical movement integrating old traditions on the West Coast of Hudson Bay was started by a young lady named Kavy Gordon, who opened the very first Glad Tidings Church in the Western Arctic in Tuktoyaktuk in 1956. She travelled extensively in the Arctic and introduced the new religious movement in Arviat and Rankin Inlet. During the services we attended in October 2005, in Arviat, the Glad Tidings church was full of young people, couples and elders. Prayers, hymns, conversion narratives and music were offered in alternance and the participants clearly enjoyed the service. The sermon by a South African minister was carefully translated by a local member of the Church. The service raised a lot of enthusiasm and joy. At the end of the service, the floor was offered to all those who wished to express their feeling or connect to the Holy Spirit, and quite a few persons moved from the back to the front crying and falling down on the floor as they were touched by the Holy Spirit.

In 1974, Bill Prankard founded a Full Gospel Church movement. Prankard, originally from Ontario, was ordained as a minister of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada. He presents himself as someone “conducting physical miracles,” “dramatic conversions and deliverances”

across Canada, for nearly 35 years. He states that “Bill Prankard Evangelistic Association provided literature, equipment, training and support, and built churches in several communities,” and stresses the efficacy of his movement to solve the many social problems affecting the Northern communities.⁷

Today, the Bill Prankard Evangelistic Association is present in several northern Canadian communities. It supports the Full Gospel Church in Qikiqtarjuaq (Stuckenberg 2005:66) and in Nain (Labrador). The leader hosts a daily television teaching program seen in over 140 countries worldwide.

In the last ten years, Roger Armbruster’s Canada Awakening Ministry, closely associated with the Sentinel group, has become a dominant factor in the development of Evangelical and Pentecostal movements in the Canadian Arctic, and other movements tend to connect to this Ministry. Therefore we will pay special attention to the programs and activities of the Canada Awakening Ministries.

Roger Armbruster and his wife Marge have succeeded in developing an important northern ministry aiming to help building the indigenous church in Canada’s North. Founded in 1978, this ministry now supports a few churches and organizes many activities. It is based in the Southern part of Canada, in the Maranatha Good News Centre in Niverville, Manitoba.⁸

More recently, the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission (NCEM), founded in 1946, has turned to the Arctic, particularly the community of Puvirnituk, in Nunavik. In 1980 and 1981, NCEM missionary Noriko Suzuki spent several weeks in that community. According to the NCEM website (ncem.gospelcom.net), the movement is now about to expand its activities in Salluit, a neighbouring community.

Since the Second World War, two different periods can thus be identified. From the 1950s to the 1990s, the Pentecostal and Evangelical movements gradually emerged in various communities, where new churches were opened. Full Gospel churches opened in Kangirsuk in

⁷ <http://www.kintera.org/site/c.irKSIYPAIoE/b.2027387/k.87A1/Canadian_Arctic.htm>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

⁸ <<http://www.canadaawakening.com/pages/aboutus/aboutus.html>>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

1970, and from there soon expanded to other communities such as Quaqtaq and Kangirsujuaq in 1978 (Dorais 2001:76), but also Aupaluk, Puvirnituk, Ivujivik, Salluit, and Tasiujaq. In Nunavut, Full Gospel churches opened in Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, Pangnirtung, and in Cape Dorset. Glad Tidings churches were opened in Arviat in 1969, Cambridge Bay in 1971, Coral Harbour and Baker Lake in 1971.

A second phase started in the early 1990s when these churches started to attract many more followers. Several factors contributed to this process, notably the extensive development of Pentecostalism at the international level as well as the new socio-political context that took shape in the North when the creation of Nunavut and the ensuing “inuitization” of many Western institutions were prepared.

Many Inuit Evangelical leaders had been fervent members of the Anglican church, but they may have felt that “inuitization” of the Anglican churches did insufficiently develop and decided to take some distance from these well established churches and move to more egalitarian churches that provided a suitable context for the expression of their views, emotions and, religious spontaneity (see e.g. the case of Pauloosie Kunilusie, leader of the Glad Tidings Church in Qikiqtaaluk; Stuckenberg 2005:67).

Most Evangelical websites, such as Canada Awakening, Christian Outreach, Canadian Christianity, ThreeCord Ministries, Christianity Today, are based down South in Canada or the USA and still run by White Evangelical leaders.

Praying in the Political Arena: Contemporary Networks

In Nunavut like in other countries, Pentecostalism also entered the political arena. In Nunavut the Full Gospel churches expanded through local as well as interlocal networks. Powerful families and leaders, such as Annie and Mark Tertuluk, were ardent followers of John Spillenaar and took an active part in expanding the movement.

Local leaders proved able to organize networks and exploit local opportunities for the spread of the new movements. The central value of prayer in Inuit religious tradition was further developed. When Canadian Governor-General A. Clarkson visited the community of Puvirnituk, and asked the leader Harry Tulugak what was “the major

factor that had caused change in the community once fraught with suicides and other problems, he replied emphatically, ‘Prayer!’.”⁹

Today, Evangelical leaders note that the antagonism of the established churches to the new movements is disappearing. Anglican, Pentecostal and Evangelical churches join in their efforts to facilitate the organization of religious meetings in Northern communities. Especially in the last five years, the size and frequency of Biblical conferences and religious meetings have increased considerably. The first Bible conference was organized by John Spillenaar in Arctic Bay, in 1984, and only involved 20 participants. But in 2003, 800 people gathered in Baker Lake, and in 2005, more than 500 people attended the Coral Harbour Bible Conference in a community of 700 residents. These Biblical Conferences serve as meeting points where leaders from different communities meet and exchange information. Besides the annual Bible conferences, the Arctic Pastors and Leaders Conference started to be organized. Gradually a network of influential leaders, some of them also active in political and economic networks, developed. Thus Tagak Curley, a Member of the Legislative Assembly, receiver of the Order of Canada and a businessman, returned to the political arena in 2003 with a strong Evangelical program. He was the main challenger of the prime minister of Nunavut, Paul Okalik, at the last elections, making a strong argument for the prohibition of same sex marriages.

Like Pentecostal and Evangelical groups elsewhere in the world, Inuit movements are marked by a certain lack of centralized authority, though some pastors are undoubtedly more important figures than others, and at the same time by “a web-like structure of personal connections” that allows members to easily find financial and technical support when needed (see Coleman 2000; Robbins 2004).

Today, Pentecostal and Evangelical groups can no longer be considered as peripheral groups. Their influence can be seen in the political arena as well as in the field of radio and telecommunication. The institution of the Nunavut Government in 1999 provided scope for a political debate on the relations between religious and moral values and political responsibility. Bell 2004 quotes Armbruster of the Canada Awakening Ministry: “... he said that in Nunavut, ‘there is a real war-

⁹ <<http://www.christianity.ca/church/outreach/2003/06.001.htm>>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

fare over the government, as the enemy seeks to influence those in office to be controlled by deceptive thoughts or by humanistic thinking rather than by the Word of God.’”

On June 21, 2006, Evangelical leaders signed a Covenant on Parliament Hill, pledging to work together. Article 2 of the Covenant states:

The First Peoples of Canada, as a healed, restored and released people, hereby affirm to co-exist and co-labour as partners in transformation with one another and with the Church in Canada, nations and governments. We will walk together in peace, prosperity and freedom. We commit to the restoration, advancement and promotion of the moral and spiritual and political integrity of our society, and the release for all from a negative past. We declare healing for our land and revival in Canada; and Canada will be a banner of healing for all nations worldwide.¹⁰

This document was signed by Inuit religious leaders such as Arreak, Deer, Tertiluk, Dewar, and Arnaquq. Clearly Pentecostal and Evangelical movements considered themselves as representing the First Nations.

In November 2003, the launch of the film *Broken Promises — the High Arctic Relocation* (Montréal, QC: National Film Board, 1994) provided another political opportunity to Armbruster to write a text to fully support the Inuit demands. Armbruster claimed that Inuit should receive official excuses and more financial support from the federal government.

A “Healing Workshop” was set up to heal the wounds of the relocations to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord in the 1950s. A “Cleansing the Land” ritual was performed in two stages. A first stage consisted in making a rock monument on the seashore where the relocated Inuit were dropped off for the first time. A general confession followed as well as a communion which consisted in pouring wine onto the ground. The second part of the ceremony was conducted in the abandoned military base, where a bar had been opened in the past, resulting in many problems of drunkenness and social violence. To cleanse the land, communion wine was again poured onto the snow.

¹⁰ <<http://64.233.167.104/search?q=cache:HF4uziIKLagJ:www.spiritalive.org/newsletter.htm>>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

Pentecostal and Evangelical movements promote the integration of Christianity, of Christian rules, and at the same time put forward Inuit models that fit well within the political agenda of the Nunavut Government. Journalist Bob Weber writes about the effective organization of the fundamentalist religious leaders and quotes James Arreak:

The creation of Nunavut is our opportunity to demonstrate the true calling of who God called us to be.

“The signs are indicating that we need to prepare ourselves for the Second Coming.” ...

Arreak preaches that hard-core Christian values are not only congruent with traditional Inuit ways, they are what the Inuit were meant to live by all along. The creation of Nunavut was simply a step along that path.

“We are a unique people, unique in almost every way,” he says. Again and again, he repeats that the creation of Nunavut is a call from God for the Inuit to transform themselves.

He effortlessly brings the old-time shamans who guided the Inuit before Christianity under his spiritual tent.

“There are oral traditional stories that shamans were sent into the spirit world to investigate the reality of (the Christian) God. They came back saying ‘Wow!’”

One of those shamans might feel right at home in Arreak’s church. He talks casually of speaking in tongues, faith-healing and exorcisms. “We do lots of them. A couple months ago, I did one in Iqaluit.” ...

The next step, says Arreak, will be to complete the joining together of separate congregations across Nunavut and northern Quebec into a single church. (Weber 2004)

These statements and references indicate the ambivalence of Inuit Pentecostal movements. These movements claim on one side to break with past views in order to promote modernity, formal education and political initiatives, and on the other side take advantage of those who are victims of the same modern system, which brought in alcohol and other social problems.¹¹ These movements may bring power of “empowerment” to their followers as suggested by the Comaroffs (1985, 1993), but disorganization or deprivation theories are clearly insufficient to explain the success of these movements in the last 50 years. Cultural dimensions have to be taken into account as these movements succeed in integrating important Inuit traditions in a new Christian framework.

¹¹ On this ambivalence of Pentecostal movements, see Laurent 2003; Mary 1999, Willaime 1999 and Robbins 2004.

Evangelism, Pentecostalism and Shamanism

A connection between Pentecostalism and shamanism is also perceived by many Inuit elders, who refer to the Pentecostal people as *qiajuut*, “those who cry,” and compare their rituals with shamanic practises of the past. According to Tungilik who had been initiated to shamanism, Pentecostal people are chanting like shamans (Oosten and Laugrand 1999:84).

The late Kopak from Repulse Bay observed: “The people with the new faith are repenting and lifting their arms and saying *halaluya* very loud. The second time they say this it is a bit louder, and then on the third *halaluya* they act like *angakkuit* (shamans). I don’t think it’s the right kind of faith” (Kopak 2004).

The late Pisuk from Rankin Inlet was quite sceptical:

I started hearing Glad Tidings people in Rankin Inlet saying that they could hear the souls going to heaven. When you know the people involved, you know that not all souls go to heaven. There are those that you envy, those that observe Sundays and go to church. Some might try to go up to heaven but they fall down the side of a cliff. (Kolb and Law 2001:86)

Qalasiq, also from Rankin Inlet cautioned against becoming too religious:

Now that we are Christian, there is a saying that if you become too fervently religious, He whom we believe in, will come and get you before you have committed a great sin. That’s why some people die when they are young. If they became very religious and their extreme religiousness was going to become fanatical, then they were made to die before they were lost. My son, who drowned, was very religious. He became extremely religious. He started knowing things that nobody else knew about. I warned him that he might die prematurely. He died when he was still young. He was trying very hard to help other people. (Kolb and Law 2001:46)

And Pisuk added:

What she has said is true. I have been told by two Catholic priests that even if I believed in religion, that I was not to become too fervently religious, as this might cost me my life. . . . To this day I can’t forget this. I go and pray with others and go to funerals but I try not to go overboard. (Kolb and Law 2001:46)

In the past, the criticism of being too religious was often directed against parousial movements (see Blaisel, Laugrand and Oosten 1999). What often attracts younger and middle aged people in Pentecostalism (i.e., enthusiastic worship, ecstatic experiences, healing practices) seems to worry elders, who attribute these abilities to shamans. It also evokes the old *maligait*, rules. Following strict rules and prohibitions (no alcohol, no work on Sunday, etc.) agrees with the shamanic prohibitions known as *tirigususiit* from the past.

Elders often compare Christian and shamanic visual experiences. Pisuk related:

If I were to go to an Evangelical or Anglican or Catholic church service, even if I really wanted to be made to see something, I wouldn't see anything. I was able to see Qimuksiraaq's *tuurngaq* (helping spirit). It was in the shape of an Arctic hare. He would go and get it from outdoors after we heard the sound of it moving on the ground. He held it in his arms and brought it inside. It was alive. . . . Nowadays when I go to church and I want to see something, I don't see anything at all. (Kolb and Law 2001:79)

Pisuk thought the shamans were more effective healers than the new religious leaders:

The priests and ministers, and the leaders in the church are not like the *angakkuit*. None of them are able to help heal you. I have heard people from the Glad Tidings church go on the radio. They say, 'Let us pray for so and so who is sick.' If someone would say to a member of the Glad Tidings church, 'Let's go visit that person who has cancer,' they wouldn't be able to heal them. If the *angakkuit* were to deal with them they would be healed. (Kolb and Law 2001:80)

Other Pentecostal rituals and models, such as public confession, possession, the idea that God, Jesus or evil spirits can take over the body and language of a person, affliction and spiritual healing through the Holy Spirit, and exorcism, all evoke shamanism (Fletcher and Kirmayer 1997).¹²

¹² In an interesting Pentecostal practice a visitor is invited to pick up a card with a religious text. The visitor is then expected to read it aloud. The game evokes divination practices of the past. See Stuckenberger 2005 for games in a religious context.

Conversion and Transformation

The new movements announce the second imminent return of Christ and emphasize the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit to solve the social problems that afflict Arctic communities today. This perspective is well illustrated in the film *Transformations* produced by the Sentinel Group. The Sentinel Group was created in 1990 by an American named George Otis Jr., who worked for some time with the American Evangelical leader Billy Graham. The ideology of the group is described on their web site as balanced between Evangelical mainline and charismatic expressions: “Our theological worldview is perhaps best defined as ‘conservative charismatic.’ ... We are convinced that prayer and spiritual warfare are an essential part of our mission to extend Christ’s kingdom on the earth.”¹³

In its videotapes, the Sentinel Group presents social problems such as alcoholism, sexual abuses, domestic violence, unemployment, etc. that Inuit have to deal with today, emphasizing the transformational healing power of God and the Holy Spirit.

The first part of *Transformations* was devoted to events in Pond Inlet. According to those who were present, Pond Inlet had been visited by the Holy Spirit. The rumour soon spread to neighbouring communities as a clear sign of an “Arctic revival.” A journalist of *Faith Today* described the events and its effects:

It started like thunder, and at first no one knew what was happening. Moses Kyak, who was operating the sound system, turned the volume off but the noise kept getting louder. Then people began falling down without anyone touching them. James Arreak, who had been leading worship, began to shake. The building began to shake. For about a minute the noise continued to fill the church, like a mighty, rushing wind. “It sounds like Niagara Falls,” says Rev. Joshua Arreak, who was helping lead an afternoon service at St. Timothy’s Anglican Church with his younger brother James. And then the sound went away. Along with the Arreak brothers, about 40 people were in attendance for the service.... It was the conclusion of several days of Bible teaching and, as is common in northern church services, people were praying fervently for God’s Spirit to come down on them. Some asked for deliverance from sins and others for healing from deep emotional wounds....

¹³ <www.transformations.com>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

Rev. Joshua Arreak, rector at St. Timothy's, was praying for people at the back of the church, while another pastor, Moses Kyak, was watching the sound system.

"And suddenly," says Joshua Arreak, "without our expecting anything supernatural, there was a visitation. The noise started to happen."

At first, no one talked about it. It wasn't until later that day, Feb. 28, 1999, that people realized how powerfully they had been shaken by God's Spirit. In a service that evening, Arreak remembers, "I was up in the front leading the worship and I realized that something spectacular had happened earlier that afternoon."

Then someone realized the event had been taped. I asked for the tape to be played to the congregation to let them know that this happened. That's when we realized that it was a very powerful visitation of God. . . .

Why did this happen in Pond Inlet? . . . All Joshua Arreak knows is that people had been praying for the community, especially for the young people, on a regular basis. A few years earlier, they had gotten together to destroy, in a huge bonfire, about \$100,000 worth of heavy metal music, pornography and drugs. "That may be partly why God was so gracious to us," says Arreak.¹⁴

In the videotape, Bill Arnaquq added: "Something started to happen that was without our control. . . . Everything was shaking in Pond Inlet. It sounded like a jet. This was another visitation of the Holy Spirit" (Otis 2001).

The power of music and voices is part of an old Inuit tradition. The drum used to be a means of communication with non-human agencies (Laugrand and Oosten, *in press*). Inuit traditions relate how people went astray because they heard voices (see Oosten, Laugrand and Rasing 1999). The testimonies contrast the Heavy Metal music, popular among youths, with the religious music that cannot be stopped. Music plays a central part in modern Evangelical services. Participants are encouraged to let the music help them connect to the Holy Spirit. Dance and bodily movements support this connection, which will bring healing joy and salvation to the believers. The importance of the connection is well illustrated by the name of the Taivitut Music Gospel Festival in Nunavik. Taivitut means "(praising) like David," and connects the performer to David who was criticized by his wife Michal for undressing when he danced in honour of God (see 2 Samuel 6).

¹⁴ See Fieguth 2002; <www.christianity.ca/church/outreach/2003/06.001.html>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

In the second part of the tape, the healing power of prayer and the Holy Spirit manifest themselves in the music that cannot be stopped.

At the end of the film, social workers, local teachers, and even mayors such as Johny Akpahatak in Aupaluk or leaders such as Annie and Mark Tertiluk in Kangirsujuaq, glorify evangelical prayer and the healing power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ They relate that they have been “born again” and revived by the Lord. In several other communities such as Aupaluk, Kangirsujuaq, Puvirnituk, Quaqtaq, and Arctic Bay, people also decided to burn on the ice drugs, heavy metal music and pornography (Otis 2001).

Networks and Globalisation: The Fijian Connection

Pentecostal and Evangelical movements often encourage their adherents to travel abroad and bring in outsiders to preach. Thus Canada Awakening Ministries promoted a few trips of Inuit new converts to Greenland in 2002, where they facilitated the building of a new church in Nuuk. In 2003 sixteen Inuit were brought to Israel, and in 2004 twenty of them visited the same country again. In 2006 another trip was organized as the 7th Annual Inuit Ministries Holy Land Pilgrimage to Israel. During these trips Christian and Inuit traditions are integrated, notwithstanding the shamanic connotations of the latter. Thus the Inuit drum is presented as “the heartbeat of life” and a bone carving of an Inuit drum dancer as “a symbol of peace, joy and celebration.” Besides these trips, The North Wind for Israel Trust Fund, inspired by Tagak Curley in 2004, raised over \$10,000.00 Canadian to support underprivileged and impoverished children.¹⁶

Canada Awakening was not the only group active in this perspective. The Bill Prankard Association sent a team of nine Inuit leaders to Siberia to spread the Gospel. The team was transported by helicopter to

¹⁵ See also Fieguth 2000, who relates the case of Jackie Koneak’s revival. In contrast to other Pentecostal communities elsewhere in the world, the local elite is playing a major role in the spread of the movement. Dorais 2001:78 points out that in 1990, the principal and six out of seven Inuit teachers of the school in Quaqtaq were Pentecostals.

¹⁶ <<http://www.canadaawakening.com/northwinds/northwindhome.html>>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

different villages during a period of nine months. According to the report, the team was welcome and spent most of the time praying with the local people.¹⁷

In 2003, The Canada Awakening Ministry developed a project to bring together Indigenous people from the North as well as from the South, representing the ends of the Earth. In Fiji as in Nunavut, the Evangelical movement is strongly represented in the political establishment. Prime Minister Laisena Qarase, like Tagak Curley in Nunavut, strongly opposes same sex marriages and supports Evangelical movements.¹⁸

Otis of the Sentinel Group, Armbruster of the Canada Awakening Ministries, Curley from Nunavut and various other dignitaries were invited to a meeting in Fiji. A Fijian Healing the Land Team was organized to restore the natural resources in the Fiji area and a trip of Fijians and Inuit to Israel in 2006 was planned. It was decided that in July 2006 the Fijian Healing the Land team would travel to Nunavut to heal the land.

Robbins (2004:5) observes that lack of good descriptions of rituals is one of the greatest lacunas in research on Pentecostalism and Evangelism over the world. As for Inuit, it is not always clear to what extent Pentecostal and Evangelical rituals really exercise a great appeal to them. Also, very little is known about the content of these practices. Therefore it is worthwhile to examine the healing the land rituals that were developed by Canada Awakening Ministries and show how they combine features from the past with more contemporary elements.¹⁹

a) *Healing the Land*

In connecting a transformation of people to a transformation of the land, the Canada Awakening Ministries evokes old Inuit traditions about the connection of the health of people and land. Several Inuit

¹⁷ See Greer 1999 and <http://www.sendrevival.com/testimonies/antarctica/revival_russian_inuit.htm>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

¹⁸ On Pentecostalism in Fijian villages, see Newland 2004.

¹⁹ Unless specific references are given, all the information and photographs on these new practices come from the following website: www.canadaawakening.com, consulted on March 18, 2007.

Elders stated that when the land became too hot by the transgressions of people they might shift their residence.²⁰

Maggie Akpahatak, the pastor from Aupaluk, related:

Many people, including our government leaders, don't see any connection between prayer and repentance with the healing of the land, but indigenous peoples have long understood the connection that there is between people and land. What people do in a particular area can either defile or pollute the land, or it can cleanse and bring healing to it. How people speak and act can determine the productivity of the land on which they live.

Armbruster described on the website of Canada Awakening Ministries how ancient Thule archaeological sites at Resolute Bay were cleansed through prayer. Thule people are presented as “a very controlled, male-dominant people” who abused their women routinely. The website describes how Allie and Susan Salluviniq, respectively the town foreman and the mayor of Resolute Bay, began to heal the land by praying:

When these legal ‘gatekeepers’ begin to take responsibility for the sins that have defiled that part of the earth where they now have legal authority, you can be sure that something will happen to the land itself. The land will become healed so that the dry, barren desolate areas will begin to become productive, and will support the inhabitants that live there.

The quotations show the close connection between religion and politics. The legal gatekeepers, the dignitaries in the administrative system, should accept their responsibility to integrate their politic and religious perspective. Then the land can begin to heal. The healing will bear fruit in the reappearance of animals. In October 2005, Armbruster thus reports the observations of a few Inuit hunters: “They found that every caribou cow had at least one calf, and that some had more than one. It is very unusual and uncommon to see a whole herd of caribou cows with even one calf.”

Armbruster also related how the land around Rankin Inlet was cleansed during Thanksgiving week-end of 2005. At a traditional meeting

²⁰ See Kappianaq in Oosten and Laugrand 2001:63, and Amarualik (IE 287).

place, where game had become scarce, about ten miles north of Rankin Inlet, the land was cleansed of its defilements by partaking of communion with one another, and applying the power of the blood of Jesus to the land itself. The ritual is not just perceived as a religious act and Armbruster has to find some “legal authority” that takes responsibility for the transformation:

I realize that there needs to be a legal authority to do this by the gatekeepers and people in authority where one is praying. In view of the fact that Veronica Dewar is a prominent leader among the Inuit, and the Past President of the Inuit Women's Association, I believe that her presence among us added to the legal authority to what we were doing.

Again success became visible. Veronica Dewar informed Armbruster on Christmas day of 2005 that there were lots of caribou around Rankin Inlet. The healing of the land not only involved the return of animals; even trees and plants were returning to a once barren land at Resolute Bay:

I am told that now in some places, even in the High Arctic, edible berries are beginning to grow as well.... There has never been a berry season in the High Arctic-only desolate wilderness. [...] Larry Audlaluk and Susan Salluviniq even shared with me how that trees are now starting to appear above the ground that were once buried and below the surface....

Could it be that the treeless Arctic tundra was once covered with trees, and was once like a garden, and that it will once again be covered with trees, and become like a garden once again?

Minerals and land resources would be affected positively as well, and the website concludes that we see that there are signs on the earth that God is healing the land in response to the prayers of His people.

b) *Reconciliation at Rankin Inlet*

In July 2006 the Fijian Healing Land arrived in Nunavut and first stopped in Rankin Inlet. The first step was to diagnose the causes of the wounds of the land. According to Ambruster not only the original inhabitants of the land, but also the newcomers would have to be involved:

The original inhabitants have a legitimate claim to a special relationship with the land, but often they hold resentments towards the later groups, and the types of changes that they have brought in building buildings and changing the landscape in ways that the originals did not approve.

In Armbruster's perspective the reconciliation of the land requires a reconciliation of the groups concerned:

In Rankin Inlet, on the morning of Monday, July 10, some of the descendants of the original inhabitants of the area began to humble themselves, and to repent of the bitterness and anger they that held in their hearts towards the descendants of the later inhabitants. On that same morning..., the later people and their descendants began to repent to the original inhabitants for not having observed proper protocol, of having simply come into the area, and doing their own thing without even asking for permission. Many tears were shed as representatives from both groups began to embrace one another. . . .

Some 30 believers showed up who wanted to bring cleansing to the land where it had become defiled through past conflicts and violence.

Then a ritual of reconciliation was celebrated within a circle of stones marking the site of an ancient dwelling.

The original inhabitants then did what had never been done many years previously, and that was to officially welcome the later groups to this area. They welcomed them to come and join them inside the circle where they were standing inside of one of the original dwellings.

This time, the later groups came into the circle with a legal authority and permission that would enable the two groups to enter into their inheritance together, to see the land cleansed and healed, and to produce enough to provide for all.

Thus the original inhabitants are endowed with a "legal authority" to welcome the newcomers on the land. By standing in the stone circles they represent their ancestors and nullify the tensions of the past. At the end of the ceremony newcomers and original inhabitants embraced each other.



Original inhabitants and newcomers embracing each other at Rankin Inlet.

The reconciliation of the two parties is not sufficient and a relation between the land and Christ has to be made. Therefore a communion was prepared with a neat division of tasks:



David Aglukark on behalf of the original habitants and Tagak Curley on behalf of the newcomers applying the wine and bread representing the body of Christ to the land.

The two groups then partook of Communion with one another, and then, together, with the land itself as David Aglukark, one of the original inhabitants symbolically applied the blood of Jesus to the land, and Tagak Curley, one of the later inhabitants, is waiting to apply the bread which speaks of the Body of Jesus Christ which was broken for us.

Then prayers were put into a hole:

People then put their prayer requests into the hole as well, which contained their heart's desires, and what they wanted to see God do for the land that they had inherited from their fathers. A stone memorial was then erected right on this historic site.

Water, oil and salt were applied to the land:

The *water* speaks of “living water” (John 7:37, 38), the *oil* speaks of the anointing which destroys the yoke (Isaiah 10:27), and the *salt* is to be a preservative agent against corruption and defilement (Matthew 5:13).



The photo suggests that the mixture of oil, salt and water is blessed by the Fijian delegation before it is applied to the land.

The water, oil and salt had previously been spiritually cleansed through the word of God and prayer, and set apart as a healing agent to bring a cleansing of the land's defilements, and a healing to the land.

Thus the reconciliation between newcomers and original inhabitants was followed by a healing of the land in four steps: 1) applying the bread and wine to the land, 2) putting prayers into a hole, 3) erecting a stone monument and, 4) the application of oil water and salt to the land as a healing agent. The first step requires a cooperation of aboriginal people and newcomers who have just been reconciliated. The second step builds on the important tradition of prayer, and a physical connection between the land and the prayers is made by putting them into a hole. The third step evokes the Inuit tradition of making *inuksuit* (stone markers) on the land that now become an emblem of the healing of the land. The final step involves the relation between the Fijians and the land embedding the ritual in a global perspective encompassing North and South.

Within two days the land was abounding with caribou:

According to the wildlife manager in Rankin Inlet, some 15,000 of them showed up right at the spot where the forgiveness and cleansing had taken place, and where the healing of the land had been prayed for. Local residents stated that the caribou in this number had not been seen in the area for some four years.

c) *Healing at Pangnirtung*

The *Fiji Healing the Land Team* flew to Pangnirtung on July 13, 2006. That same evening a group of believers drove through a place

... where drug dealings are alleged to have taken place, and in an area near there, in previous generations, shamanistic practices had taken place, and in some cases, curses had been released that needed to be broken. Strong prayers and intercession was waged right from that very spot.



Creating a healing circle to cleanse the land.

On Saturday evening of July 15, Fijian pastor Vuniani invited the original inhabitants and later people (including White people) to come to the front in two groups facing each other. Then he invited Armbruster to take over the meeting and a general repentance of all participants for their attitudes and behaviour towards members of the other group followed. Armbruster emphasizes that even though outsiders were present (including a plane load of 12 Greenlanders who had come to Pangnirtung for this Healing the Land Conference, and one or two representatives from a number of communities in Baffin Island), “The people and leadership of Pangnirtung clearly saw this as their Conference. It was done under their authority, and with their blessing. They took ownership of both the Conference and the follow-up afterwards.” As in Rankin Inlet, the repentance was followed by embraces between the members of the two groups. The following morning, Sunday morning of July 16, Anglican and Full Gospel Churches joined in a Communion. The Healing the Land Team washed the feet of all the spiritual leaders of the community. Armbruster reports that after a sermon about the crippled man at the pool of Bethesda, a miracle happened: “A man called Jeetaloo, who had been bound to a wheelchair for some four years, for the first time got out of his wheelchair and walked!”

In Pangnirtung the land was also cleansed with oil, water and salt. Armbruster argues that the land already belonged to the Lord because

he had created Pangnirtung, and the whole procedure of cleansing was much less elaborate. It took place within the gym. Soil of the land was collected in a bucket and mixed with water, salt and the oil. It was “prayed over by the *Fiji Healing the Land Team* to be given back to the Lord while the leaders and elders of Pangnirtung gathered around to give their agreement and approval.”

Apparently the defilement of the land was not seen in terms of long-term conflicts, as in Rankin Inlet, but in a short-term perspective relating to the community today. On July 17 Loie Mike wrote: “Our land was defiled by you and me. Whenever you and I commit idolatry, adultery, shedding of innocent blood, breaking of covenants, and hold back our tithes and offerings, we defile the land, and it needs healing.”

During the final evening service with the Fiji Team in Pangnirtung, on Thursday evening of July 20, a beautiful rainbow appeared over the whole community. Fijian pastor Vuniani pointed out that the rainbow was a sign of the covenant that God had made with man to remove the curse, and of his promise never to let the earth be cursed by a universal flood ever again.

The Need for Moral Reform

Solving social problems is high on the Pentecostal agenda. Members of the Full Gospel Church do not drink alcohol, discourage smoking tobacco and are not permitted to substitute marriage with common-law relationships.

Political leaders, such as Tagak Curley, elected in Rankin Inlet, have campaigned against the inclusion of sexual orientation in the Human Rights Act. Tibbetts (2003) reported: “James Arreak said he was testifying on behalf of Inuit elders who oppose a ‘gay tidal wave.’ The Inuit, explained Mr. Arreak, strongly oppose same-sex marriage because it violates survival through procreation.... ‘Inuit values would say that gay people cannot create life, that they cannot produce a child.’”

Pentecostal Inuit have also campaigned for the restoration of religious instruction in the schools (Bell 2004). In Nunavik, many people and at least three communities, notably Salluit, contested the teaching

of Darwin's theory in local schools arguing that this theory about evolution offends Inuit traditional beliefs.²¹

During the Arviat Men's Event that took place in Arviat in August 2004, David Aglukark, Tagak Curley and James Arreak extensively discussed marriages and intergenerational relationships, emphasizing the need for the protection of the institutions of marriage and the family. At The Youth of Puvirnituq Event in 2004 Pastors E. Sallualuk, Q. Tookaluk, and J. Alloloo addressed the young people.

The youth were exhorted to become violent in the spirit against the evil spirits of suicide and lust that had been attacking them from without, and against the attitudes of bitterness and unforgiveness that had been attacking them from within. . . .

While youth were crying out to the Lord, one night, this young girl . . . came up to plead with her fellow youth to forgive their parents, to let the past go, to no longer hang on to the old resentments and bitterness. In between sobs, she spoke passionately and powerfully, and her words hit home with her fellow young people. Parents were also exhorted to reach out to their youth and children, and to turn their hearts to their children, so that the hearts of the children would be restored to the fathers. . . .

Many of the youth began to weep as they wondered what to do next. . . . Then it happened. Many of the youth did not walk, but literally ran to their parents to fling themselves toward them as they were sitting in their chairs or standing. They were completely wholehearted to release forgiveness, and to hold nothing back.²²

A relative of a young man who attempted to commit suicide that very night requested the people to pray for that man, and the next day he returned to tell the people that his relative had not only survived, but was even fully recovered.²³

The Third Promise Keeper Event, "Gender and Generations Healed," held in Rankin Inlet on the 2005 Thanksgiving Weekend, was dedicated to the topic of "Marriages of Integrity." Social problems were discussed, such as healing the gap between the generations. Fathers were encouraged to create bonds with their children, and a plea was

²¹ All the information and photographs on these new practices in this section come from Ambruster's website: www.canadaawakening.com unless indicated otherwise.

²² <http://www.threecordministries.org/Arctic_Adventures.htm>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

²³ <<http://www.canadaawakening.com/pages/Fall%202004%20Reports/PuvirnituqYouth.html>>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

made to retain the wholeness of the family and avoid separation victimizing the children:

Each family member is unique and special, and yet each needs to be connected in order to achieve their own destiny and purpose in life. ... This is how the world will be changed — one family at a time — as each comes into oneness, wholeness and healing rather than to normalize and legalize our promiscuity and disconnectedness and isolationism from one another.²⁴

Pentecostal and Evangelical movements also often provide new opportunities for women to develop public leadership, hence the good relationships between these groups and the Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association. They wish to involve more women in religious activities. Since 2006, a Linking Hearts Annual Women's Conference is organized with invited women leaders from other Canadian regions.

All these initiatives aim to promote the constitution of solid Pentecostal communities. In contrast to Pentecostal movements in Africa, studied by Meyer 1999, Inuit groups do not so much emphasize a global community as a healthy local group.

Redefining Connections to the Past

Transformation of a community also implies redefining connections to the past. This is an old tradition. Inuit elders have always emphasized that one's wrongdoings would affect the life of children and grandchildren. Conversely, the misfortunes of people are often related to the deeds of their ancestors and namesakes. Therefore Pentecostal and Evangelical perceptions that many contemporary problems are linked to the sins of the previous generations have strong appeal to Inuit.²⁵

Since those sins committed in previous generations are still affecting our generation today, this generation can break that curse and defilement by identifying

²⁴ <<http://www.canadaawakening.com/2005%20Reports/December%2005/genderandgenerations.html>>. Consulted on March 18, 2007.

²⁵ All the information and photographs on these new practices in this section come from Ambruster website: www.canadaawakening.com unless indicated otherwise.

with the sins of our fathers, and repenting for them. We might say, ‘Well, I was not there when these things happened,’ or that ‘I didn’t do those things personally.’

Thus transformation implies connecting to the past as well as redefining it. This ambiguity of the past is a structural feature of the modern discourse. The *inummariit*, the true Inuit of the past, represent a generation that was able to survive out on the land without modern technology, but they are also associated with taboos and superstitions that should be rejected.

Today, many elders favour a revalorization of the past. The Nunavut Government followed suit in coining the notion of *Inuit qaujimajatuqangit* (Inuit traditional knowledge). Inuit should reconnect to the *inummariit*, their ancestors and their way of life. The Pentecostal and Evangelical movements connect to this problem of redefining the past by focusing not only on the *inummariit* but also on external agents such as whalers and traders. The *Fiji Healing the Land Team* therefore also visited two places with strong historical connotations: Marble Island, an island northeast of Rankin Inlet, associated with whalers as well as with traditional practices, and Kekerten, an island in Cumberland Sound, where the Scottish whalers had a station.

a) *Marble Island*

On July 11, 2006, some twenty-five Inuit from Rankin Inlet, eleven members of the *Fiji Healing the Land Team* and Roger and Marge Armbruster travelled by boat from Rankin Inlet to Marble Island located at a distance of some 25–30 miles, to cleanse and heal the land. Armbruster summarizes an origin myth of the island relating that an old woman made the wish that the ice would be transformed into marble so that her spirit could live on in that island. Armbruster does not question the existence of such a spirit, but wonders about its moral nature:

Clearly, we can see that this refers to some kind of an *ancestral spirit* that is alleged to live on this strange island of pure white rock which it is said to have first materialized as if by magic. The question needs to be asked, “Is this spirit motivated by *fear* or by *love*?”

Armbruster explains that people who go to the island are told that they must crawl a few feet in respect for the old woman’s spirit:

In fact, some legends have it that if people do not bow down and “crawl” to show respect for this ancestral spirit, that they will die within two years. I do not know if these myths were created by some of the original shamans, but I do know that not all of the shamans were plugged into the dark side of the spirit world. Some were true prophets of God who prepared the way for the coming of the gospel, and used their spiritual authority to encourage their people to accept the teachings of the Bible.

Armbruster does not reject the shamanic past completely but integrates it into his Christian perspective, postulating that shamans prepared the way for the coming of the Gospel. According to him, part of Marble Island’s special place is due to old Inuit traditions, another part results from the presence of the white people. Armbruster refers to the James Knight expedition of 1719 that was wrecked on the island and all members of the expedition died on the island. He adds a long list of disasters relating to Marble Island and emphasises the many forms of sicknesses and diseases which were brought to that place by the whalers who took Inuit wives and begot many children:

As a result, as the children born to these relationships grew up, imagine their identity crisis, as the children were part Inuit and part non-Inuit. Without their non-Inuit fathers not there to raise them, and to love them, the children suffered, and many had to struggle to accept themselves, and to believe that they were just as valuable as children who had fathers, and whose parents were both Inuit. Further, the mothers could not have felt other than used, exploited and without self-esteem. There was no equality in the relationships.

Armbruster identifies four particular areas “that bring defilement to the land, and that affects the environment in which we live today”: “1. Idolatry, witchcraft, or the worship of ancestral spirits or the impersonal gods of nature; 2. Adultery, or any kind of sexual sin or perversion; 3. The shedding of innocent blood; 4. The breaking of treaties and covenants.”

When the group arrived, “nobody came on to the island crawling, or intimated that the spirit that controlled this island could bring a curse upon those who had come here, because they knew that the power of blessing is greater than the power of cursing.” Armbruster specifies that the healing ritual required the healing experience already acquired by the *Fiji Healing the Land Team* under the legal authority of the indige-

nous tribal chiefs throughout Fiji as well as the presence of descendants of the original inhabitants of the land, descendants of the people who have practiced shamanism, and white people such as Roger and Marge Armbruster, who could identify with the descendants of European and American whalers. The ritual of the cleansing of the land is not described on the website, but it was probably done very much in the same way as in Rankin by applying the bread and wine representing the flesh and blood of Christ to the land.

According to Armbruster, the land cannot be cleansed by money, but only “by the shedding of blood, for life is in the blood.” He thus explains that, “It will ultimately either be the blood of the family who sinned, or it will be the blood of Jesus which continually cleanses us from *all* sin whenever it is applied,” but that, “Justice demands that sin be atoned by blood.” After the ritual a Fijian and an Inuk reported that “a tarp of defilement that had covered the land was being lifted as the land was cleansed.” Finally, a memorial was made by piling stones so it “would serve for the next generation but also as a sign of blessing to God.”

b) *Kekerten*

When the Fiji Team arrived in Pangnirtung in July 2006, the issue was raised that some of the main problems in the community went back to the sins of adultery committed when people still lived in Kekerten Island in Cumberland Sound, some fifty kilometres south of Pangnirtung. Present-day elders in Pangnirtung acknowledge that at the time of the whalers many Inuit men would allow their wives to have sexual intercourse with the whalers in exchange for tobacco and cigarettes.

Loie Mike related that present problems went back to a shamanic curse which was effected in 1970 when people exceeded their whale quotas. “Local Inuit say that since that time, the number of whales diminished even more, and they have never since been as plentiful as they once were.” A collective trip to Kekerten Historic Park was organized on July 19, 2006, involving some forty people and eight boats. Besides three Fijians, the group included young believers and elders. The whole group gathered together within the foundations of one of the original storehouses in a circle, and the healing process was led by the leader of the *Fiji Healing the Land Team*.

The group assembled in a circle around the original flag pole that that had been erected in the island beside the largest station house in 1857.



A prayer was spoken and two elders explained what had happened in Kekerten island. Armbruster reports:

The stories were told about how the Inuit women were used by the whalers for their own sexual gratification. However, the fault was not only with the whalers. The Inuit men realized that their fathers had *allowed* their wives to be exploited for sexual purposes by the whalers, sometimes in exchange only for something like tobacco.

The group divided into two sub-groups, a male and a female one, each group being asked to repent.



... the male descendants of these Inuit men who allowed their wives to be used by the whalers in exchange only for tobacco got down on their knees in front of the women present, and repented for their sin, and the sin of their fathers. They realized that their father's sin was also their sin, in that sexual sin had persisted until this day.



... a woman elder is standing in front of the men to release forgiveness, and to speak on behalf of her own grandmother and great grandmother in releasing the men for having allowed the women to be used. She very humbly released total forgiveness, and also acknowledged and repented on behalf of the women who had sinned as well.

In the first stage of the ritual men and women repented and apologized to each other.

In the second stage, Armbruster together with the Anglican Minister from Pangnirtung, repented “on behalf of the European and American whalers for their horrendous exploitation of the Inuit, for not having observed proper protocol and respect and for having used their women.”



After the identificational repentance by the men, and release of forgiveness by the women, both husbands and wives began to embrace one another, and to talk about things in private if they had any issues between them that needed to be repented of.

The collective repentance was followed by individual exchange as husbands and wives discussed the issues they had between them and repented their wrongdoings.

In the next stage of the ritual the shamanic curse was reversed and transformed into a blessing:

Further, the Inuit identified with the sins of their fathers wherever they had put curses on the land, such as with the shaman who had cursed those government officials who charged an Inuk man for surpassing the quota on whales during the

1970s, resulting in a further depletion of the whales. That curse was changed into a blessing, so that the curse would be reversed, and transformed into a blessing, and a returning of the whales in greater number.

Pastor Vuniani read out aloud with the participants, Deuteronomy 33:13–16a, 19 and Psalm 148:7–10, texts that stress the richness of the resources from the earth. Finally, as in preceding cleansings of the land, water, oil and salt that had been prayed over and sanctified unto the Lord were applied to the land. In this case they were poured over a pile of rocks in Kerkerten Historical site:



Now the curse was reversed and the water around Kekerten changed to its original dark colour, and a new kind of fish was seen in the water.

Discussion and Conclusions

Evangelical and Pentecostal movements in Nunavut have developed in close cooperation between religious leaders in the North and Pentecostal and Evangelical organisations down South. They have a strong social commitment focusing on the solving of social problems in the North.

The Healing Circles that developed in the 1990s (Lepage 1997; Arnakaq 1999) were also closely connected to the new movements, and today their leaders often play an important role in the expanding Pentecostal and Evangelical movements. The Healing Circles focused on human suffering. They present the past as a source of wisdom as well as of suffering. By reconnecting to the old traditions people can be healed from their pain and suffering. The causes of suffering are often attributed to the coming of white men and the institutions they introduced. Angaan-gaq who organizes healing circles recalls that “When the white men arrived, they made Inuit small.” He emphasized that,

The complexity of social problems is deep and disturbing. Why are there so many? One of the greatest reasons is that Inuit are being put down by the people who came up north. They did not come to serve Inuit, they came to take over. And of course when someone takes over your life, you lose your own identity. You lose your own security. You lose your own traditions. We are clinging on to them. (Suvaguuq 2004:37)

Pentecostal and Evangelical churches apply a similar reasoning and tend to develop similar concepts of regeneration. Many of their leaders are “reborn” and only became religious leaders after deeply suffering from the severe social problems affecting modern Nunavut.

Today, a close network of political and religious leaders supports the Evangelical movements and churches in local communities. Although Evangelism has spread rapidly in the Eastern Arctic, its institutional basis remains weak. Many Inuit still attend large scale services and meetings, but that does not imply that they will leave their old churches. The Evangelical and Pentecostal movements have a strong appeal, but they also evoke strong resistance, and elders associate marked features of these movements with shamanic traditions. They also object to being too religious. Especially in the last ten years the Canada Awakening Ministries, supported by the Sentinel Group, has developed an ambitious program to connect North and South, political and religious order, and to transform the land and society into a new religious and political order. The covenant signed at Parliament Hill on June 21 testifies to these ambitions. It illustrates how Evangelical leaders claim the role of representatives of the First Nations. This ambition is clearly expressed in the rituals of healing the land. Armbruster tries to give a

legal foundation to these rituals by involving administrative authorities, but it is quite clear that the consent of the communities is not really required. The Evangelical leaders themselves organize the rituals and decide how the various significant categories of aboriginal people, newcomers, men, women etc. will be represented. These healing rituals evoke traditional rituals as well as Western traditions. Rituals of cleansing the land appear to already have existed before the coming of Christianity. Thus missionary E.J. Peck reports that the Nunagisaktut carried the confessions of the people to Sedna and in doing so prepared the land for hunting (Laugrand, Oosten and Trudel 2006). In the traditional rituals people had to respect the land and to adapt to it. Thus people had to follow the rules of the location, crawl to Marble Island, give pieces of meat at specific river crossings, avoid specific places etc. In the Pentecostal rituals we find an inverse approach. Precisely these rules are abolished and the land is subordinated to the new religious and political order. In this respect the Pentecostal rituals evoke Western traditions where explorers claimed the land by hoisting the national flag on a pole inserted in the land. In this way the land was subordinated to the political order represented by the newcomers, and the relations of the original inhabitants to the land were subordinated to this new order. In the Pentecostal rituals the new order is a transcendental order subordinating the land to Christ. The relevant groups are defined in terms of modern ideology (such as autochthones and allochthones, men and women) and they confess and apologize to each other. Only after these confessions and apologies can the land be cleansed. Legal authorities should be present to authorize the proceedings. The application of bread and wine, representing the flesh and blood of Christ, and the elements of water, salt and oil, effect this transformation, which is then objectified in the erection of a stone monument as a lasting memorial of this transformation of the land. The ritual operates with a modern ideology that is effected through a ritual of repentance. Men and women, newcomers and original inhabitants, have to become each other's equals and repent all actions that deviated from this course. Thus the new transcendent moral order implies a cleansed land inhabited by equal individuals that respect each other as equals. The building of *inuksuit* (cairns of stones), now interpreted as signs of a new covenant, connects the new ritual to the old tradition, and a divine sign (a

rainbow, the lifting of the tarp etc.) confirms that the ritual is accepted by God. Thus the ritual brings together traditional, legal, political and religious dimensions.

The rituals fit perfectly into the modern ideology of the Canadian state and can thus easily be perceived as a bridge from the present state of suffering of the aboriginal people to a new political and religious order that harmoniously unifies modern Christian and political ideals. The rituals play on the old ideals of confession and repentance, the use of *inuksuit* as markers, the close relationship between the health of society and that of the land. In this respect, they provide a recognizable idiom that allows for the transition to a modern political structure. In their emphasis on global relationships they connect Inuit to Fijians and Israel testifying to a new order of mobility where all nations meet in the context of this new transcendent order.

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Bones of Contention: Buddhist Relics, Nationalism and the Politics of Archaeology

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Abstract

Relics of Śāriputta and Moggallāna, two of the Buddha's closest disciples, were discovered by Fred. C. Maisey and Alexander Cunningham in a stūpa at Sānchī in 1851 and were re-enshrined at the same place in November 1952. The exact whereabouts of the relics between these two dates has been uncertain, partly because both Buddhists and scholars have assumed, incorrectly, that the relics that were brought back to India had been in the possession of Mr Cunningham. The purpose of this article is to give a detailed account of the relics of Śāriputta and Moggallāna found at Sānchī. The account is based on correspondence and notes about the relics found in archives of the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, and on relevant sources published by the Maha Bodhi Society. I argue that the quarrel over the relics was an important part of the revival of Buddhism from the end of the nineteenth century. I also discuss how the relics of the two saints were used by the government of India as nationalist symbols.

Keywords

Buddhist relics, Sānchī, Śāriputta, Moggallāna, Victoria & Albert Museum, Maha Bodhi Society

There seems to be an increasing fascination with relics and different aspects of relic-veneration in Buddhism among scholars of religion.¹ In this article, I will look at the modern history of the relics of Śāriputta and Moggallāna, two of the Buddha's closest disciples. The relics of the Buddha and his chief disciples came to occupy a special position among

¹ Several relatively recent books treat the subject of Buddhist relics at length: See Strong 2004; Germano and Trainor 2004; Trainor 1997; Schopen 1997.

the Buddhist antiquities that were discovered in the colonial period. On the one hand, the relics and their caskets had great artistic and historical value for the British. On the other hand, they were holy objects to the Buddhists. This generated a struggle for power and authority in the interface between British archaeology and Buddhist religious revival — a struggle between British administrators, collectors and museum authorities and Buddhist leaders. The most important Buddhist organization in this struggle was the Maha Bodhi Society of India founded by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1891. A number of important relics were excavated in India by British archaeologists in the late 1800s and early 1900s and came in the possession of museums and private collectors in Britain. The struggle over Buddhist relics has continued from the second half of the nineteenth century till today. To complicate matters, the Indian Prime Minister Nehru used the Buddhist relics in his programme of secular, multi-religious nation building from Independence in 1947.

The Relics of Two Buddhist Saints

There is little wonder that the remains of the Buddha himself should be of great importance in the modern revival of Buddhism. But, surprisingly perhaps, in the literature of the Maha Bodhi Society the return of the relics of the two disciples Śāriputta and Moggallāna in 1952 is treated as an occasion as important as the homecoming of the remains of the Lord Buddha himself. Devapriya Valisingha's greatest achievement as General Secretary of the Maha Bodhi Society of India, a post which he held from the higher ordination of the founder Dharmapala in 1933 till 1968, was the recovery of the relics of Śāriputta and Moggallāna.²

In fact, the return of the relics of these two prominent disciples of the Buddha has become the most significant historical point of reference in the memory of the Maha Bodhi Society, equalled in importance only by the return of the relics of the Buddha, and the homecoming of the remains of the two Buddhist saints and their re-enshrinement in Sānchī are represented in numerous published documents both as a celebration

² This was so both to his own mind and in the opinion of the organization as a whole. See for instance Po 1962:18; *Maha Bodhi 1891–1991 Centenary Volume*, 56.

of pan-Asian Buddhism and as a symbol of the respect shown by the former colonial power in regard to the history and religion of a sub-continent that was looking for ways to tackle the turbulent consequences of its “tryst with destiny.” But this was the story produced by a religious organization with a craving for international recognition and an Indian state in desperate need of a unifying and peaceful national mythology built around personages such as Gandhi and the Buddha. Indeed, the two were often compared. In reality, the return of the relics was an endless story of quarrel and dispute between the Buddhists and the owners of the relics in London.

The request for the relics was *not* happily acceded to by the authorities of the Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A from now on) as the result of a courteous visit to London in 1938 by Mr Devapriya Valisingha, as the Maha Bodhi Society presents the story.³ The process involved an endless stream of correspondence between Buddhist organizations (groups other than the Maha Bodhi Society were involved), on the one hand, and the V&A Museum and the British Museum, on the other, and an equally large stream of letters and minutes within and between the Museums as well as between the Museums and the concerned departments of the British Government.

This article presents the case of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna as part of the revival of Buddhism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The article is based primarily on these and similar documents, which have been deposited in files in the V&A Museum in London, and secondly on the literature of the Maha Bodhi Society. The primary concern of this article is to reconstruct the struggle between the parties over the relics of two Buddhist saints — “a very tiresome question” as the Director of the V&A Museum Leigh Ashton once described it in a letter to the India Office. However, the *significance* of this story becomes clear when we put it in its right contexts. Firstly, we must see it as an important part of the revival of Buddhism that transformed the religion from the end of the nineteenth century. Secondly, the governments in Sri Lanka, in India and in other Asian states used the relics to legitimate state power.

³ *Maha Bodhi 1891-1991 Centenary Volume.*

In 1849 Lieutenant Fred. C. Maisey, who was employed in archaeological work by the Government of India, was directed to prepare an illustrated report on the stūpas of Sānchī, their sculptures and inscriptions.⁴ He spent the cold seasons of the next two years at the place, measuring and carefully preparing his illustrations of sculptures on the gateways. Passing through Gwalior on his way Sānchī in October 1850, Maisey met Alexander Cunningham, who was then a major and an executive engineer in the neighbouring district.

Alexander Cunningham would become a prominent person in British Indian archaeology in the middle of the nineteenth century with respect to the Buddhist sites of Bengal. He had contributed to Indian archaeology since the 1830s with architecture as his favourite field. In 1861 he became the Archaeological Surveyor to the Government of India and he immediately started working for the implementation of a systematic programme of preservation of monuments in different parts of India. Cunningham's preservation programme consisted first of all in making detailed descriptions of monuments by measuring, mapping, drawing, photographing and copying inscriptions. Cunningham was anxious to examine the stūpas at Sānchī and arranged a visit with Maisey. On 23 January 1851 Cunningham reached Maisey's camp in Sānchī and stayed for seven weeks.⁵

The work of the two gentlemen at Sānchī consisted both in making detailed descriptions of the pillars and bas-reliefs of the gateways to the great stūpa and in examining and opening the three stūpas in the area. One of the objects found a few feet to the east of the southern entrance to the great stūpa was a magnificent lion pillar, the shaft of which Cunningham reckoned would have been 31 feet and eleven inches tall.⁶ The capital of the pillar, which measured 3 feet and 11 3/4 inches, was

⁴ An early summary of the history of British work on the Buddhist remains on the spot was published in 1902: see Burgess 1902.

⁵ Cunningham 1968:xii.

⁶ Cunningham 1968:124. See also Maisey's account, which often simply refers to Cunningham but nevertheless is of some interest, not least because of its rather eccentric conclusion: "That the Buddhism of Gautama, or Sakya Buddha, dates, not as usually supposed, from the sixth century B.C., but from about, or perhaps shortly before, the commencement of the Christian era. . . ." (Maisey 1892:2. As far as I know, Maisey's views of the dating of Buddhism and the Buddha have never been taken seriously by later scholarship.

crowned by four lions standing back to back, and although the heads were broken, the limbs were so boldly sculptured and the muscles and claws so accurately represented that Cunningham concluded it would have been made by a Greek sculptor employed by Aśoka.⁷ The capital is now the state symbol of the Republic of India.

Already the first stūpa revealed a number of relics. Stūpa no. 3 is of particular interest here. Cunningham describes its opening:

A shaft was sunk in the centre of this Tope, and after a few hours' labour we came to a large slab upwards of 5 feet in length, lying in a direction from north to south. On raising this slab we saw two large stone boxes each bearing a short inscription on its lid. That to the south bore Sariputasa, "(relics) of SARIPUTRA"; that to the north bore Maha Mogalanasa, "(relics) of MAHA MOGALANA."⁸

Cunningham and Maisey had found the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna. Each of the two boxes was a cube of about 1 1/2 foot with a thick lid and each contained a steatite casket. Sāriputta's box contained, in addition to the casket itself, two pieces of sandalwood, which Cunningham believed must have been taken from the funeral pyre of the great Buddhist saint. The relic casket contained one tiny fragment of bone alongside a flat piece of pearl, two small seed pearls, a garnet bead, a tar-shaped bead of lapis-lazuli, a crystal bead and an oblong bead of pale amethyst.⁹ Cunningham concluded that these objects were the seven precious things that were often placed alongside the holiest relics, a custom, he said, which is still followed by the Buddhists in Ladakh. The steatite casket of Moggallāna contained two small pieces of bone.

Before we continue our story, we may consult some older sources to establish how the earthly remains of Sāriputta and Moggallāna ended up in Sānchī. Sāriputta's place of birth and death was a place called Nālakagāma. According to G.P. Malalasekera, this was a Brahmin village near Rājagaha.¹⁰ The Saṃyutta Nikaya informs us that Sāriputta died from disease while attended to by the novice Cunda. When the

⁷ Cunningham 1968:125.

⁸ Cunningham 1968:191.

⁹ Cunningham 1968:192.

¹⁰ Malalasekera 1960 *s.v.*

eminent monk had passed away, Cunda took his bowl and outer robe and went to see Ānanda, who was staying in Anāthapiṇḍika's park near Sāvattthi together with the Buddha. When he arrived at the park, Cunda presented the bowl and robe of Sāriputta to Ānanda, and one of the Burmese manuscripts of the text adds that Cunda carried the relics of the great monk in a water-strainer.¹¹ This would mean that Sāriputta had already been cremated. Moggallāna died a violent death at the hands of robbers shortly after Sāriputta. According to the Jātaka account, a sepulchral monument (*cetiya*) was built in Veluvana and the relics of Moggallāna were placed in it.¹² Veluvana was a pleasure garden of King Bimbisāra near Rājagaha. It was given to the Buddhist Saṃgha by the king and was the first park accepted by the Buddha. The Jātaka says that the *cetiya* was built at the gateway to Veluvana.

Both Sāriputta and Moggallāna died in the vicinity of Rājagaha and their bones were placed in stūpas in the area. Now first of all it must be pointed out that the relics of the two saints were not only found in Sānchī; Cunningham discovered relic caskets engraved with the names — again in the genitive case and in the same script as the engravings from Sānchī — of the two disciples of the Buddha in a stūpa at Satdhāra.¹³ He quoted a Chinese source to establish that stūpas at Mathurā also contained relics of the same two disciples. All this led him to conclude that the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna were scattered almost as widely as the relics of the Buddha himself. He conjectured that their bones would initially have been deposited in stūpas at Rājagaha and remained undisturbed until the time of Aśoka, who distributed the relics of the Buddha and his chief disciples throughout India.¹⁴ Aśoka is said in the Buddhist texts to have broken open the eight stūpas erected by Ajātaśatru immediately after the death of the Buddha and divided the relics between stūpas throughout the subcontinent. Some scholars have taken this as historical fact,¹⁵ while others have doubted the historical accuracy of the accounts. T.W. Rhys Davids, for instance, said:

¹¹ *Saṃyutta Nikaya* ed. Feer, p. 161–62; Woodward 1956:141, esp. n.3.

¹² *Jātaka* 5.127.

¹³ Cunningham 1968:209. See also Willis 2000:80–81.

¹⁴ Cunningham 1968:197–98.

¹⁵ See for instance the useful article of Fleet 1906.

“That the great Buddhist emperor should have done this is just as unlikely as that his counterpart, Constantine the Great, should have rifled, even with the best intentions, the tombs most sacred in the eyes of Christians.”¹⁶

The V&A Buys the Relics for “a peppercorn value”

The Buddhist revival in Ceylon, and later in other parts of Asia, which is the historical context of this article, produced a substantial literature both in English and in Sinhalese. Some of the letters and writings of leading figures in this revival have been collected by A.W.P. Guruge, and one interesting aspect of the correspondence collected by him is the anxious communication about Buddhist relics. The Sinhalese monk Subhuti (1835–1917), who was well known among Western orientalist and often helped them with tracking manuscripts or translating texts, wrote to Cunningham 11 September 1874: “I am informed, that, in your explorations in the wilds, you have recovered some sacred Relics of Buddhism from some of the ancient ascents and ruins of Buddhist Temples.”¹⁷ Cunningham’s reply is dated 23 October 1874: “There were authentic relics of Sāriputta and Maha Moggallāna, as well as Mogaliputta and Majjhima, the contemporaries of Asoka, and several others. But all are now lost.”¹⁸ The relics, he said, had been lost in the great fire at the Pantechmicon. In other words, the communication with the great archaeologist was in vain from the point of view of the Buddhist revivalists.

There has been much confusion about the whereabouts of the relics after they were brought to the UK. Buddhists and scholars have assumed that the relics now contained in the purpose-built stūpa in Sānchī originally belonged to Cunningham. For instance, one recent volume about Sānchī asserts that the relics that were re-enshrined were found by Cunningham in Satdhāra.¹⁹ This is also the official view of the Archaeological

¹⁶ Rhys Davids 1901:399.

¹⁷ Guruge 1984:159.

¹⁸ Guruge 1984:160.

¹⁹ Tartakov 1996:114.

Survey of India.²⁰ In his book on Buddhist reliquaries, Michael Willis writes that the reliquaries from Satdhāra inscribed with the names of Sāriputta and Moggallāna were in the V&A Museum and that they were sent to India on 8 October 1948 at the order of the Ministry of Education. According to Willis, Cunningham and Maisey divided their finds according to taste. Cunningham selected many of the reliquaries with inscriptions and Maisey preferred pieces of artistic rather than archaeological interest.²¹ Cunningham brought his reliquaries back to England on two different ships, one of which sank near Jaffna.²² Maisey's pieces came separately to England and were permanently acquired by the V&A Museum in 1921. But Willis writes that the relics and reliquaries of Sāriputta and Moggallāna found in Sānchī are unaccounted for and may have gone down with the ship.²³ According to Willis, then, the only relics left of Sāriputta and Moggallāna were the ones found in Satdhāra in the possession of Cunningham. Thus, Willis assumes that the relics and reliquaries given to the Maha Bodhi Society must have been part of Cunningham's collection from Satdhāra.²⁴ The same view is propounded in the magisterial *Relics of the Buddha* by John S. Strong. Strong writes that relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna found by Cunningham were returned with great fanfare to India in the early 1950s.²⁵ In short, this is the general assumption among scholars of modern Buddhism.

However, this assumption is not correct. The material about the relics filed by the V&A Museum, and corroborated by the letter from Cunningham to Subhuti, reveals that the relics that were re-enshrined at Sānchī in November 1952 were never in the possession of Cunningham and they were not the relics found in Satdhāra. The relics belonged to Lieutenant Fred. C. Maisey. Whether Cunningham had really lost the relic-boxes found in Satdhāra, or whether he was, perhaps, telling a lie in order to get a zealous Buddhist off his back, is a different question.²⁶

²⁰ Mitra 1978:44, n.1.

²¹ Willis 2000:8.

²² Willis 2000:8.

²³ Willis 2000:68, n.6.

²⁴ Willis 2000:81, n.6.

²⁵ Strong 2004:206.

²⁶ It was raised by Dr Michael Willis, private communication. See also Willis 2000:68, n.6.

In 1866 the objects found by Maisey were lent to the South Kensington Museum, which later became the V&A Museum, where they remained on loan until 1921. This year the Museum was approached by the inheritor of Maisey's collection, Miss Dorothy Saward, who wished to sell the collection, which was quite substantial according to the inventory made by the V&A Museum. Among the eight Buddhist objects were the relic-caskets of Śāriputta and Moggallāna, catalogued as nos. 1 and 2 of the Maisey collection by the Museum, i.e. the reliquaries that Willis described as unaccounted for.

On 4 May 1921, Maisey's son wrote a letter to the Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum (Indian Section) authorizing his niece,²⁷ Miss Dorothy Saward, to sell to the Museum, on his behalf for two hundred and fifty pounds, the collection of eight relic boxes and their contents obtained from the Buddhist Topes (stūpas) in the Bhilsa District by his late father in 1851.²⁸ Soon after the Museum took action. On 31 May 1921 a report was made by Stanley Clarke of the Museum in which he urged the institution not only to buy the objects but also to make up its mind quickly on the matter:

I earnestly beg to suggest that sanction for purchase be granted without delay, as the price placed upon the objects is actually a 'peppercorn value' generously arranged by the Vendor to enable the Museum to purchase the entire collection. In view of the prices recently given both by American and Japanese agents in the London Sale-Rooms, we are faced with the serious consideration that, should these objects be put up for public auction, the unhappy certainty is that: 1) they will all command very much higher prices; and 2) they will be lost, not to this Museum only, but also to the country.²⁹

The case was urgent and Mr Clarke's report contains scribbled notes that Miss Saward has been calling again and is particularly anxious to know whether the Museum wants to buy the objects or not. Among the objects that constituted Maisey's collection were the two caskets with the relics of Śāriputta and Moggallāna, and when the curators now decided to buy the collection, these became the property of the V&A Museum.

²⁷ This word is partly destroyed in the letter and therefore uncertain.

²⁸ Victoria And Albert Museum Registry. Nominal file on Miss Dorothy Saward.

²⁹ Victoria And Albert Museum Registry. Nominal file on Miss Dorothy Saward.

The Initial Approach of the Buddhists

The ownership would soon become contested by people who claimed to have a religious entitlement to the relics that should take precedence over the mundane proprietary rights that the Museum had acquired by its purchase. On 17 April 1932 one G.A. Dempster wrote to the Director of the Indian Museum, Kensington, on behalf of the Buddhist Mission — i.e. the British Maha Bodhi Society — about the Buddhist relics in the possession of the Museum:

You are probably aware that a new Vihara has recently been opened at Sarnath, Benares, called the Mulagandha Kuti Vihara, which site was once connected with the activities of the Buddha himself. and [sic] we feel that could the Government be induced to hand the ashes of the Buddha's most famous disciples to the custody of the Vihara authorities, it would not only be doing an act of grace to the Buddhist community throughout the world, but would ensure their safe custody in a Buddhist Shrine on the actual soil from whence Buddhism sprang.³⁰

Evidently, the pious British Buddhist had been inspired by the news that relics of the Buddha had recently been returned to India from Britain and re-enshrined in a purpose-built edifice in Sārnāth. The letter also says that the Buddhists have contacted the British Museum on the subject of Buddhist relics. Three days later, on 20 April 1932, Eric Maclagan wrote on behalf of the Indian Museum to A. Esdaile of the British Museum, asking whether they had been approached about Buddhist relics, too, and suggesting that, if this was the case, they bring their reactions in line. This would be a case where the two Museums should take the same stand, he said, realizing that they in principle should be opposed to the request, as it would provide a precedent for many awkward demands.³¹ Esdaile answered promptly that he intended to inform the Buddhist Mission that the Trustees of the British Museum were precluded by law from giving up any object in their trust and that

³⁰ Letter from G.A. Dempster to the Director, Indian Museum, 17 April 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

³¹ Letter from Eric Maclagan to A. Esdaile, 20 April 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

the relics were indeed kept with due care and respect.³² Maclagan was happy to hear about the line taken by the British Museum. Although he doubted that the V&A actually had the same legal tie, he intended to reply in a similar strain, he informed his colleague.³³

It is clear that the curators in both Museums felt that the request could result in more claims. A minute paper was produced by the V&A Museum containing a presentation of the case to the Board of Education and a suggestion for the phrasing of the negative reply to the Buddhists. There is no doubt that the Museum perceived the matter as delicate already at this stage mainly because, as indicated by the communication between Maclagan and Esdaile and confirmed by the minute paper, they in fact “have discretion to grant the request.”³⁴ As the paper said,

Obviously all leading museums contain all sorts of articles which are of great religious, sentimental or historical interest to the countries of their origin, and any general acceptance of the view that it would be reasonable to return such articles whence they came would raise fundamental issues.³⁵

A handwritten comment in the minute paper draws attention to the number of Christian relics of even greater import than the Buddhist relics. The paper adds that there is no reason to think that there is a demand in India itself for relics and admits that if the Indian Government might press for return of such objects, this would be very hard to resist. On 11 May the Buddhist Mission was duly informed that the Board of Education was unable to authorize the Victoria and Albert Museum to comply with the request.³⁶

³² Letter from A. Esdaile to E.R.D. Maclagan, 26 April 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935. Esdaile mentions in this letter that he remembers having been approached by a similar request three years earlier. This request originated from “an Indian source.”

³³ Letter from E.R.D. Maclagan to A. Esdaile, 29 April 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

³⁴ Minute Paper 32/3870.

³⁵ Minute Paper 32/3870.

³⁶ Letter from Director and Secretary Bernard Rackham to G.A. Dempster, 11 May 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

The case was definitely not closed with this letter, but it now took an unexpected turn. On 18 October the Hon. Secretary of the Buddhist Mission E.W. Adikaram wrote to the Director of the Indian Section of the V&A Museum with a new request. After explaining the importance of Śāriputta and Moggallāna in the minds of Buddhists he asked to be allowed to worship the relics, claiming that the 2476th anniversary of the passing away of Śāriputta would fall on the next full moon day, namely on 13 November 1932. He asked for the relics to be sent to the headquarters of the Buddhist Mission under the protection of the Museum staff for a few hours on this date to enable the Buddhists to pay their homage to the saints.³⁷ The Museum refused to take the relics out of the building, but allowed a small delegation of Buddhists to worship the relics in the office of A.D. Campbell. In fact, the granting of this somewhat unorthodox boon was almost entirely the result of the good-heartedness of Mr Campbell of the Museum, who arranged the session and asked for permission from the director. The matter is discussed in a communication between Eric Maclagan and the Board of Education on the matter.³⁸ Mr Campbell replied to the Buddhist Mission:

Dear Sir, I am glad to be able to inform you that permission has been granted by the Director of this Museum, and by the Secretary of the Board of Education, for the Casket and the Relics of the Ven. Bhikku Śāriputta to be venerated on the afternoon of Sunday, Nov.13th at the Indian Museum....³⁹

But in spite of Campbell's benevolence, the Museum staff was clearly apprehensive about the motives of the pious visitors, and Campbell's reply reveals his suspicion about the real purpose behind the Buddhist worship. He insisted that the number of visitors must not exceed 20 at any time and that no public notice of it should appear in the press. In

³⁷ Letter from E.W. Adikaram to The Director, Indian Section of the Albert & Victoria Museum, 18 October 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

³⁸ Letter from E.R.D. Maclagan to the Board of Education, 21 October 1932, and letter from the Board of Education to E.R.D. Maclagan 24 October 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

³⁹ Letter from A.J.D. Campbell to the Manager of the Buddhist Mission in London, 27 October 1932. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

other words, the Museum would not allow the occasion to be used for propagandist purposes. Although the Buddhists turned up on the appointed time and carried out their worship according to the agreement, the Museum had ample reason to be wary, as we shall see below.

A Quarrelsome English Buddhist

The files of the V&A Museum contain no communications on the matter of the relics in the following years, until the question pops up again in the summer of 1938 through a letter from one Frank R. Mellor, a British Buddhist.⁴⁰ Mellor first requested the Museum to set up a seat directly in front of the relics in the Museum so that Buddhists might worship them. When Director Maclagan politely refused his request, Mellor continued sending letters in which he deplored the Museum's sacrilegious treatment of the holy remains of Buddhist saints and demanded that they be handed over to the Buddhists.

The line of the Director on the matter was unchanging; he insisted that the relics were treated with the respect they deserved and that giving in to claims from pressure groups would set dangerous precedents. Maclagan compared the relics with Christian relics in the Museum. The relics of Christian saints had religious value to a number of people, too, but giving them away to believers was out of the question. Mellor, however, was not only a quarrelsome old man with a lot of time on his hands, he also had strong anti-Christian attitudes and Maclagan's comparison of Buddhist with Christian relics deepened his indignation:

To be at all comparable the Christian requaries (sic) should contain the ashes of two of the first disciples of Jesus Christ. Even then the comparison would not be complete for I believe that the first Christian disciples were rude fishermen who did not behave very well when their Master was alive and made no mark on their age afterwards. Sāriputta and Moggallāna, on the other hand, were highly educated Brahmins.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Letter from F.R. Mellor to the Manager, The Indian Section, 19 August 1938.

⁴¹ Letter from F.R. Mellor to the Director and Secretary, Victoria & Albert Museum, 13 September 1938. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

Letters from other British Buddhists now started to stream in to the Museum on the matter of the relics, and journalists started to become curious about the agitation that was building up. It is clear that Mellor, in spite of bad health, became the headache of the Museum through the latter half of 1938. In the beginning of the new year Maclagan again wrote to one of his colleagues at the British Museum asking whether they had had similar experiences. He wrote:

A section of the small English Buddhist community is badgering me to return certain relics of early Buddhist disciples which are exhibited in our Indian section; on the ground that their presence in a Museum outrages the sensibilities of the devout Buddhist. I have replied that they are in a similar position to the many Christian relics which we, and most other big Museums, exhibit in our cases.⁴²

Maclagan mentioned in his letter that a young, newly converted Roman Catholic approached him on similar grounds. (It is, perhaps, noteworthy that the people who make trouble are all fervent new converts.) The British Museum had not had the same problems. Sir John Forsdyke wrote back: “We have other Buddhists’ bones, but perhaps no one knows about these, or they are not saintly enough to be useful for propagandist purposes.”⁴³ The agitation was building up in 1938 and 39, but it was still the kind of approach that could be contained by the Museum authorities. For many months the troublemakers were only more or less eccentric English converts, who wrote angry letters about the sanctity of the relics and the blasphemy of keeping them on exhibition. But on 21 April 1939 Eric Maclagan received a letter from Mr F.W.H. Smith of the India Office:

Dear Sir Eric, We have received a letter from the Government of India, dated the 18th March last, forwarding a copy of a letter from the President of the Buddha Society Bombay, which alludes to the presence in the Victoria & Albert Museum of the Ashes of Shariputra and Moggallaina, two disciples of the Buddha, and asks

⁴² Letter from E.R.D. Maclagan to Sir John Forsdyke, British Museum, 6 January 1939. *Buddhist Relics*. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

⁴³ Letter from Sir John Forsdyke to E.R.D. Maclagan, 7 January 1939.

that they should be removed from the Museum and handed over to the Maha Bodhi Society of Calcutta.⁴⁴

The India Office asks whether it is indeed correct that the V&A Museum is in possession of the relics, and solicits Eric Maclagan's views on the possibility of returning the objects to the Buddhists. Mr Smith at the India Office assures the Museum Director that if the Museum would be disposed to part with the relics, he would not have to worry about the costs of transport and other conditions. The letter from the Buddha Society of Bombay that Smith was referring to was dated 27th December 1938. It read:

As desired by the meeting of the Buddha Society of Bombay held at the "Ānanda Vihara" in Bombay, on the 11th of December, 1938, I beg to enclose herewith a resolution passed unanimously at the said meeting regarding the handing over of the ashes of Shariputra and Moggallaina, the two chief disciples of Lord Buddha, to the Maha Bodhi Society of Calcutta. The above mentioned relics are now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in England. The removal of these valuable relics of the two chief disciples of Lord Buddha has caused great unrest and displeasure amongst the Buddhists of India, the birth-place of Lord Buddha. I, therefore, request you very earnestly on behalf of my society to kindly write to the Victoria and Albert Museum to kindly hand over the said relics to the Maha Bodhi Society of Calcutta so that they may be enshrined at Sarnath in India.⁴⁵

With this cover letter came a resolution from the Buddha Society of Bombay appealing for the return of the relics to the Maha Bodhi Society.

With the letter from the India Office, the case had moved to a new level. The Government of India had become engaged on behalf of Indian Buddhist organizations and the English Buddhists were sidelined from now on. The internal communications in the V&A Museum

⁴⁴ Letter from F.W.H. Smith of the India Office to Sir Eric Maclagan, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, 21 April 1939. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958. S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

⁴⁵ Copy of letter dated 27 December 1938, from the President, Buddha Society, Bombay. Disposal of Burmese relics in Indian collections at S. Kensington. File no M/3/338.

reveals that the matter had taken on a new urgency.⁴⁶ Eric Maclagan was still firmly against the idea and argued along the same lines as he had done in the past: if the Museum were to give back Buddhist relics, they would have to yield to similar claims from Christian countries. Interestingly, one of his colleagues, who seems to have had a slightly different view on the matter, wrote the following counter-argument in the margin of one of the Director's minutes: "Rubbish — this is a Christian country." Evidently, he meant that the giving back of Buddhist relics could not set precedents for Christian relics because Britain could claim the same rights as any other Christian country.

With the Government of India in the game, the Museum realized that they would have to yield to the demands, and as the requests now originated in Indian circles they carried more authenticity in the eyes of the Museum authorities. However, Director Eric Maclagan was not happy about the outcome. In the Minute to the Board of Education from the V&A Museum concerning the final decision of the Museum to make the relics available and refer the final decision to Whitehall, Maclagan closed his statement with his view on who was to blame for the whole case: "[A]nd I have little doubt that the agitation with regard to these Buddhist relics has been almost entirely due to the efforts of one particular English Buddhist and arises partly from the fact that he is sharply separated on various points from other Buddhists in this country."⁴⁷ The English Buddhist referred to was, of course, Mr Mellor, whose approach to the relics was denounced by Christmas Humphreys and his Buddhist Society. Maclagan finally had to write to the India Office with a conclusion that clearly was against his own wishes.

Dear Mr. Smith, I have been discussing your letter of April 21st with the Board of Education and I am instructed by them to inform you that they would be prepared to authorise us to hand over to you the two small inscribed reliquaries which are believed to contain fragments of the calcined bones of Shariputra and Moggallaina. It would clearly be best for the India Office to take the responsibility of deciding with the Governments of India and Burma the question of where

⁴⁶ Minute Sheet. Ref.39/1876. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

⁴⁷ Minute Sheet. Ref.39/1876. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

the reliquaries should be deposited and I would suggest for that reason that the reliquaries themselves should be handed over to the India Office, in order that they may be dealt with in accordance with whatever decision is arrived at.⁴⁸

Sir Eric Maclagan had lost his fight to keep the relics of the Buddhist saints in his museum. He had been instructed by the Board of Education to inform the India Office that the Board of Education would be prepared to hand over the relics. The India Office was happy with the outcome, and a few days later Sir Eric was kindly instructed to refrain from causing further offence to the Buddhist by displaying the holy objects:

Dear Sir Eric, Many thanks for your letter of the 29th April, No. 39/1876, informing us that the Board of Education are prepared to authorise you to hand over the relics of the two Buddhist disciples, Shariputra and Moggallaina (sic). The Secretary of State is very grateful for the readiness of the Board of Education to adopt this course of action. We are now informing the Government of India of the above position, and taking up with them and the Government of Burma the question of where the relics should be deposited. If you would prefer not to retain the reliquaries in the Victoria and Albert Museum pending the reaching of a decision on this question, we will arrange to take them over, but if you have no objection to keeping them in the meanwhile we think that this would be the best plan, provided that, in order to avoid the possibility of giving further offence, you would agree to their being removed from the showcase and not exhibited to the public, and could conveniently make arrangements to this end.⁴⁹

A week later, on 6 June 1939, Eric Maclagan informed the India Office that the relics had been withdrawn from exhibition and put in a safe

⁴⁸ Letter from Eric Maclagan to Mr Smith, India Office, 29 April. Disposal of Burmese relics in Indian collections at S. Kensington. File no M/3/338. Also Letter from E.R.D. Maclagan to F.W.H. Smith, India Office, 29 April 1939. Minute Sheet. Ref.39/1876. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935. The same letter is found in the V&A files and in the file on Burmese relics of the British Library.

On the case during the this period it should be noted that the files of the V&A Museum and the files on Burmese relics in the British Library complement each other. The reason is that the case was handled by both the Government of India and of Burma.

⁴⁹ Letter from F.W.H. Smith, India Office 31 May. Disposal of Burmese relics in Indian collections at S. Kensington. File no M/3/338.

place pending further notice by the Government.⁵⁰ In his view, the whole museum was now in danger of being looted by zealots from all over the world intent on bringing home the symbols of their cultural and religious heritage.

The Relic Caskets

Now the records of the V&A Museum are silent for several years, probably due to the war, and when the case turns up again it is on the matter of the formal handing over of the relics by the Secretary of State for India to the representative of the Maha Bodhi Society, Mr Daya Hewavitarne. The handing over took place on 20 February 1947, and Mr Hewavitarne subsequently brought the relics to Ceylon, where they were received with great pomp and remained on exhibition for almost two years. On 31 March 1947 Daya Hewavitarne wrote to Director Leigh Ashton from Ceylon, informing him of the safe arrival of the relics and the regal reception given them in Ceylon.⁵¹ He also had some questions about the contents of the caskets, which contained more pieces of bone than recorded by Cunningham in his book. But on closer inspection there were more things that seemed awkward about the “gift” brought from London: The caskets containing the sacred relics were not the original but plaster copies; the Museum authorities were clearly playing the Maha Bodhi Society for a fool. Officially, the Museum could and would hide behind a definitional somersault: They had agreed to return the relics, *i.e. the tiny fragments of bone contained in the caskets*, but had said nothing about the receptacles. However, this line of reasoning would never be acceptable to the British Government if it were perceived as deception by the Buddhist organization and its patrons in the Indian Government — as, naturally, it was.

⁵⁰ Letter from E.R.D. Maclagan to F.W.H. Smith, India Office, 6 June 1939. Minute Sheet. Ref.39/1876. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

⁵¹ Letter from Daya Hewavitarne to Leigh Ashton, Director, Victoria & Albert Museum, 31 March 1947. Buddhist Relics. Part 2. S.F. 90 48/1732 and S.F. 90 46/886. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

Internal communication reveals that the Museum conceived of the idea of sending plaster casts of the original caskets when it became clear to them that they had to yield to the official pressure to return the relics. The Director of the V&A Museum, Leigh Ashton, suggested in a letter to the India Office that the Museum might hand over the relics while keeping the original receptacles:

I assume that we have committed ourselves to returning the relics but I suggest that we do not part with the caskets which are of considerable artistic and historical interest. The matter is an obviously complicated one but I cannot help feeling that simply to pack the things up and send them off to India is not good enough, and I feel, and so does Mr Codrington, that the decision to hand these things over to the Maha Bodhi Society of Calcutta is also not good enough.⁵²

The India Office answered that they had no objection to this arrangement provided that it was acceptable to the Indian Government.⁵³ And from now on, because of their delicate position between the British and Indian Government and the Maha Bodhi Society, the authorities of the Museum had to resort to a degree of subterfuge to carry out their plan. If the Buddhists realized what the Museum was planning to do, they would certainly protest and the British Government would undoubtedly intervene on behalf of the Buddhists. The Government's prime concern was the relationship to the Indian Government.

The Maha Bodhi Society did in fact become suspicious that the Museum would try to keep the original caskets while handing over the contents, and the organization wrote a letter to the British authorities on this matter: "I am anxious to know whether the Victoria & Albert Museum authorities have agreed to return the Relics in the original caskets in which they were discovered."⁵⁴ The British authorities did not want the V&A Museum to create an embarrassing situation for them,

⁵² Letter from Leigh Ashton to the India Office, 16 April 1946. Buddhist Relics. Part 2. SF 90 48/1732 and SF 90 46/886. Converted to Nominal File 31/12135.

⁵³ Letter from the India Office to Leigh Ashton, 16 July 1946. Buddhist Relics. Part 2. SF 90 48/1732 and SF 90 46/886. Converted to Nominal File 31/12135.

⁵⁴ Copy of a letter dated 9th October, 1946, from the General Secretary, Maha Bodhi Society of Ceylon, to the Director General of Archaeology in India. Buddhist Relics. Part 2. SF 90 48/1732 and SF 90 46/886. Converted to Nominal File 31/12135.

and the India Office wrote to Leigh Ashton of the Museum asking whether he intended to send the original caskets. Now that the Maha Bodhi Society had expressed their concern on the matter of the receptacles, the somewhat miserly interpretation of the deal adopted by the Museum, according to which only the fragments of bone constituted the relics, seemed unacceptable to the British Government. Therefore, the official of the India Office gave a clear signal to the Museum about the attitude of the Government. “He hopes,” he said, “that the Museum will be able to implement their promise to the Maha Bodhi Society.”⁵⁵ But from the point of view of the Museum the handing back of the original caskets was not part of the original deal and they wished to keep the boxes for their artistic value; they stuck to their interpretation of “relics” and kept the Buddhists in the dark on the details surrounding their preparations for the surrender of the objects.

The idea of making copies of the caskets reveals something important about the attitude of the curators to religious objects. First of all, it shows that they did not believe in the sacredness of such objects — not primarily because the objects belonged to an alien religion, but because of their modern secular worldview. More importantly, however, it reveals an attitude to archaeological objects very similar to the one that Benedict Anderson has discussed in relation to the colonial archaeology of Southeast Asia: the attitude that everything within the realm of the colonial state was a profane representation of some category and that everything could be infinitely reproduced. The individuality of objects, as well as of all other things: peoples, languages, religions etc., were undermined by placing them in a totalizing classificatory grid which symbolized the state’s real or contemplated control.⁵⁶

The plan was carried out; plaster models were made and the contents of the original caskets were transferred to the new receptacles. However, the scheme was soon laid bare by the recipients in Ceylon and in June 1948 the High Commissioner for India wrote to The Under Secretary of State, Commonwealth Relations Office: “Subject: Return of the Original Caskets containing the Sacred Relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna to

⁵⁵ Letter from the India Office to Leigh Ashton, 7 November 1946, Buddhist Relics, Part 2. SF 90 48/1732 and SF 90 46/886. Converted to Nominal File 31/12135.

⁵⁶ Anderson 1991:182–85.

India.”⁵⁷ The letter contained a request, on behalf of the Maha Bodhi Societies of India and Ceylon, to return the original caskets. With this attitude of the British Government the Museum could not possibly resist this final demand, and the original caskets were handed over to the High Commissioner a few months later. The receipt of the caskets was acknowledged in October, and with this the case of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna was closed once and for all:

Sir, I am directed by the High Commissioner for India to acknowledge receipt of the original Buddhist caskets, once containing the sacred relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, which were handed over by you on 8th October, 1948, to the High Commissioner's Legal Adviser, Sir D.N. Mitra, who received them on behalf of the Government of India. The Caskets are being sent to Ceylon, from where they will subsequently be taken to India, for presentation to the Maha Bodhi Society.⁵⁸

The Museum got their copies back in February 1949, and the assistant keeper wrote to India House to acknowledge the receipt of the replicas, “in exchange for the two original caskets which were sent to Ceylon.”⁵⁹ We may note, however, that the question of Buddhist relics in the V&A Museum was not over with the handing over of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna. The High Commissioner for Ceylon in the UK wrote to the Museum in 1957 to obtain other Buddhist relics from the same collection to be enshrined in a stūpa in Ceylon built in connection with the 2500th anniversary of the passing away of the Buddha. The Museum's minutes express the weariness of the curators, whose predecessors had bought the Oriental collection of Fred C. Maisey in good faith: “This concerns a matter which has been plaguing the Museum on and off since 1932. The India Section was fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to

⁵⁷ Letter from the High Commissioner for India to the Under Secretary of State, Commonwealth Relations Office, 5 June 1948. Buddhist Relics. Part 2. SF 90 48/1732 and SF 90 46/886. Converted to Nominal File 31/12135.

⁵⁸ Letter from the Office of the High Commissioner for India to the Director, Victoria & Albert Museum, 11 October 1948. Buddhist Relics. Part 2. SF 90 48/1732 and SF 90 46/886. Converted to Nominal File 31/12135.

⁵⁹ Letter from J. Irwin, Assistant Keeper, Indian Section, Victoria & Albert Museum to the Secretary, External Dept. India House, 14 February 1949.

acquire in 1921 five early Buddhist relic caskets from Sānchī and its vicinity in India.”⁶⁰

It should be clear from this article so far that several different attitudes to history, to religion and to religious objects came into conflict in the case of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna. The central protagonists in this story were the followers of Anagarika Dharmapala in the Maha Bodhi Society; the General Secretary from 1933, Devapriya Valisingha, for instance, played a leading role. Thus, the Buddhist claim to the relics originated in Buddhist circles in Colombo and Calcutta that had been brought into being as a result of Dharmapala’s work to establish Buddhism in India and take control over Buddhist sites in the Bengal-Bihar area.

This milieu subscribed to a religion that has been called *Protestant Buddhism* because of the similarities with the religious outlook of Protestant Europe and America.⁶¹ One of the most important traits of Protestant Buddhism was the blurring of the traditional roles of monk and layman; Protestant Buddhism was about the right of lay people to engage in the high soteriological religion of Buddhism and to strive for *nirvana*, although the access to basic religious texts was in practice far more restricted than in Protestant Christian countries. A corollary of this emphasis on individual religious responsibilities was a privatization and internalization of religion. To some extent, then, the conspicuous public veneration of relics is incongruous with the worldview of Protestant Buddhism.

It would perhaps be unfair to argue that the attitude of the Maha Bodhi Society to the relics was purely pragmatic — that they only used the relics to gain recognition and support. Still, they were adept at manipulating religious symbols to reach goals of a more political nature. A good example of this tactics is the case of the Japanese Buddha image used in the struggle to take control over the temple at Bodh Gaya in 1895. By insisting on worshipping a Buddha image inside the temple, which was owned by a Hindu Mahant, Dharmapala managed to provoke a confrontation with the Hindus on the spot. The conflict led to

⁶⁰ Ref. 57/3799. Buddhist Relics. Part 1. 1932–1958.S.F. 90. Converted to Nominal File 31/12/1935.

⁶¹ See Gombrich and Obeyeskere 1988, especially chapter 6.

a series of court-cases, which, incidentally, did not pay off for the Buddhists.⁶² In view of their attitude to religious objects and their general religious world view, I think it is fair to say that the motivation of the Maha Bodhi Society for wrestling the relics of Sāriputta and Moggllāna from the V&A Museum and take them to India was a mix of some religious piety *and* a strong desire for international recognition for the case of the Buddhist revival in Asia. At the same time, we must bear in mind that there was often a contradiction between the Protestant Buddhists' emphasis on reason and scripture and the need for new rituals and emotional religious practices to pull the laity together into one nation.

The Political Use of the Relics in Indian Nationalism

After a long period of work the Maha Bodhi Society had finally succeeded in winning back the relics of the two disciples of the Buddha. But their job was not completed with this: they wished to re-enshrine the relics in Sānchī, which was in India, while at the same time retaining control of the relics on behalf of the Buddhists. Local authorities in India turned out to be very forthcoming on the matter. In the winter of 1945–46 the Maha Bodhi Society sent a delegation to the Nawab of Bhopal to ask for permission to re-enshrine the relics in Sānchī. It was a prominent despatch, which included P. Vajiranana, the President of the Society, P.P. Siriwardana, Honorary Secretary, and two other important members. After a round of negotiations with the Government officials of the Nawab the case was settled. The Bhopal Government was highly encouraging and promised that they would do everything they could to help the Maha Bodhi Society construct the necessary buildings. Moreover, the Nawab promised a personal donation of 25 000 rupees towards the cost of the enshrinement.⁶³ At Qasr-e-Sultani, Bhopal, on 7 January 1946, the Nawab presented his reply to the address of the Maha Bodhi Society. His speech, which was reprinted in *The Maha Bodhi*, was made in a tone not only of friendliness but of heartfelt gratitude for the work of the Maha Bodhi Society pertaining to the relics.

⁶² See Brekke 2002. *Makers of Modern Indian Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also Trevithick 1988.

⁶³ *The Maha Bodhi* 54 (1946) 146–47.

The relics were now coming home, the Nawab felt, to the place where they belonged. “Sāñchi without its relics, which were taken away from there, was like a body without spirit,” he said.⁶⁴

The next day the actual agreement between the Government of Bhopal and the Maha Bodhi Society was signed by the Political Secretary of the Government and the four delegates of the Maha Bodhi Society. The agreement comprised four points: 1) The relics would remain with the Government in trust for the Buddhists; 2) the Maha Bodhi Society would have unfettered rights of control of the shrine and the ashram, which they were planning to erect on the spot; 3) the shrine and the ashram with their associated structures would be the property of the Maha Bodhi Society; 4) worship at the shrine would be managed by the Maha Bodhi Society. In other words, the rights of the Maha Bodhi Society over the relics and their shrine would be complete, and the Society was clearly seen by the Nawab and his Government as the caretakers of the holy remains on behalf of all Buddhists, a role which the Society was more than happy to assume.

The relics were handed over to the Maha Bodhi Society on 20 February 1947 and re-enshrined in Sāñchī on 30 November 1952. The whole period between the handing over and the re-enshrinement, more than five and a half years, was basically one great procession cum exhibition, where an intriguing mix of religious devotion and secular power was displayed with great zest and often a considerable portion of pomposity. The relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna were used by the governments in both Ceylon and India to legitimate state power.

In order to get a better understanding of the symbolism that surrounded the relics on their long way from London to their final resting-place at Sāñchī, we may take a more detailed look at the days from 13 to 15 January 1949, when the relics arrived on Indian soil and were received in Calcutta. The relics had arrived in Ceylon on 14 March 1947 and had been kept there till 6 January 1949, when they were handed over by Mr D.S. Senanayake, the Prime Minister of Ceylon, to the High Commissioner of India in Colombo. Six days later they arrived in Calcutta. On 13 January they were received on the boat, H.M.I.S. Tir, by the Governor of West Bengal Dr Katju. He walked slowly up the

⁶⁴ *The Maha Bodhi* 54 (1946) 147.

gangway of the vessel, in a solemn procession, together with the Premier of the state, a Major-General, distinguished Buddhist monks, representatives of the Government of Ceylon and the Chairman of the Relics Reception Committee. The procession was headed by two military officers, and a guard of honour on the deck presented arms as the procession boarded the ship. The Governor proceeded to inspect the soldiers and the contingent of the ship's officers. After a short interval, the procession returned ashore. At the head of the procession were Kandyan dancers carrying the Buddhist flag. (This is the flag invented by the Theosophist Colonel Olcott half a century earlier in his eagerness to unite Buddhists of the world under common symbols.) After the dancers came the Governor, Dr Katju, under a canopy of white silk, which is the classical Indian symbol of earthly power. As the procession emerged from the jetty, the cannon of Fort William fired 19 shots, while a guard of honour from the Gurkha Rifles saluted with their guns and a military band played. The procession continued in cars to Government House, where the relics were installed on a temporary altar and worshipped by monks. The same evening the relics were put on exposition in the presence of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Prime Minister of India held the glass containers with the relics and showed them to the distinguished guests — diplomats, monks and senior politicians — who had assembled in Government House.

The following day, 14 January 1949, a grand ceremony was held in the Calcutta Maidan, near the Victoria Memorial. In the mouthpiece of the Maha Bodhi Society, *The Maha Bodhi* 57 (1949), we can see a photograph of Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister of India, as he hands over a casket containing the remains of the two Buddhist saints Sāriputta and Moggallāna on behalf of the Government of India to Dr Shyamprasad Mookerjee, President of the Maha Bodhi Society of India. The ceremony takes place on a 20 foot high rostrum, lavishly decorated with flowers, before an endless sea of spectators. The Maha Bodhi described the situation under the title THE HOME COMING OF THE SACRED RELICS. INTERNATIONAL CEREMONY AT CALCUTTA MAIDAN BEFORE HALF A MILLION PEOPLE:

A congregation of at least half a million people representing different nationalities attended the public ceremony in connection with the handing over by Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister, of the sacred relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna Arahans, the two chief disciples of Lord Buddha, to Maha Bodhi Society of India at Calcutta Maidan on Friday morning, 14th January, 1949.⁶⁵

The ceremony was a mammoth happening with representatives from different Buddhist countries and other official guests. Prayer poles and banners brought by Tibetan and Nepalese monks flew in the breeze and monastic robes of yellow or red stood out against the crowd. The Prime Minister himself wore a yellow rose in his buttonhole as a symbol of Buddhism and was showered by yellow rose-petals on his way to the stand. The ceremony started at 8 am with the chanting of *suttas* and sacred music, and a running commentary on the festivities was broadcast on All India Radio. At 10 am the Prime Minister, accompanied by the Governor and prominent Buddhists guests, arrived in procession at the Maidan from Government House bearing the relics and saplings from the Bo tree. A silent and attentive crowd lined the one-mile route from Government House to the Maidan, and when the solemn group arrived at their destination, there was a salute. When the Prime Minister and the representatives of the Maha Bodhi Society of India and Ceylon had taken their places on the rostrum and the reliquary was placed on its own flower-decked stand, the ceremony was initiated by the administration of the Pañca Sila (i.e. the standard Buddhist five precepts of good behaviour) by N. Jinaratna Thera of the Maha Bodhi Society of Ceylon to the audience in the Maidan. Today the ultra-modern altruistic philosophy of the Buddha was symbolically replanted in the soil of its origin, the commentator of *The Maha Bodhi* wrote proudly.⁶⁶

The coupling of Buddhism and state power was the central theme, although unarticulated, on these two lively days in Calcutta, as it was throughout those five and a half years during which the relics were paraded around South and Southeast Asia. After a period of exhibition in Calcutta, the relics were taken to Bihar, Burma, Ladakh, Sikkim, Assam, Nepal, Tibet, Orissa and Cambodia. Of course, it might be said that the official nationalism of the young Asian states had benign goals: the procession of Buddhist relics emphasized unity and peace. As many

⁶⁵ *The Maha Bodhi* 57 (1949) 5.

⁶⁶ *The Maha Bodhi* 57 (1949) 6.

nationalist theorists have asserted, religion and history are quarries from which various cultural elements can be appropriated to give legitimacy to, and emotional support for, social change;⁶⁷ the Buddhist past was an excellent source of building blocks for a peaceful nationalism.

Nehru's great concern was how to mould the peoples of India into one nation, and the tradition of Buddhism was well suited to create something close to a civil religion for India. Nehru saw Buddhism as a peaceful, integrative force, and the enshrinement of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna in Sānchī was an excellent occasion for him to preach unity. To Nehru the relics became a symbol of India's tradition for religious tolerance, friendliness and forgiveness. When speaking on the occasion of the return of the relics, Nehru asked the listeners at the Maidan in Calcutta to remember that in doing honour to the relics this must have a deeper meaning. They honoured the relics because they represented the eternal Indian message of non-violence, co-operation and doing good even to the evil-doer.⁶⁸ Both Nehru and the other speakers at the ceremony emphasized the Indian tradition of non-violence, or *ahimsa*. This, of course, was a very short time after the mayhem that accompanied independence and the creation of Pakistan. At the same time, the murder of Gandhi by an RSS activist had made Indians acutely aware of the destructive forces of communalism and the martyred leader became an even more valuable symbol of peaceful coexistence than in the last years of his life, when he was politically marginalized.⁶⁹ All the speeches at the Maidan drew a line from the Buddha to Gandhi; indeed Gandhi became a modern Buddha in their rhetoric of peace and harmony. Non-violence and the peaceful coexistence of different religious communities were prerequisites for the survival of India, and the occasion of the handover of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna was seized on by the politicians to drive home their message of integration and peace. The representatives of the Maha Bodhi Society were more than happy to let the bones of the Buddhist saints make a contribution to the political stability of the young nation. Buddhism and Buddhist relics and archaeological remains are still being

⁶⁷ Smith 1998:112.

⁶⁸ Nehru's speech reprinted in *The Maha Bodhi* 57 (1949) 10.

⁶⁹ Brown 1991:337.

used by India to promote itself as a multi-religious state with a great heritage. In October 1998 the Indian Prime Minister Vajpayee used his visit to a three-day Buddhist festival in Bihar to ease tensions in that turbulent part of the country. Both the federal and state presidents and foreign guests were present, and relics of the Buddha were displayed.⁷⁰

“To Cherish and Conserve”: The Politics of Archaeology and Museology

The relationship between archaeology and politics is a relatively new academic field.⁷¹ The links between archaeology and the building of religious, ethnic and national identities surfaced in academic literature in the 1980s, when certain archaeologists started attacking the scientific pretensions of their discipline.⁷² Many of the scholars belonging to the new paradigm (post-processual archaeology) went too far in their criticism of the positivist underpinnings of their own tradition and ended up in extreme relativism.⁷³ Some of the conclusions of the new, relativist view of archaeology have been picked up in a limited number of attacks on colonial archaeology in recent years.⁷⁴

Archaeology became a contested field in the development of a new type of religious identity in South Asian religions in the nineteenth century. This happened in Jaina and Hindu communities as well as among Buddhists. Many religious leaders wished to prove that their tradition was

⁷⁰ *The Hindu*, 26 October 1998.

⁷¹ See Kohl and Fawcett 1995. In their introduction the editors discuss the reasons why the links between nationalism and archaeology have been an “unstudied and unacknowledged phenomenon” in academic literature (14). See also the review article of three recent works in the field, Parkins 1997. See also the special issue of the journal *Nations and Nationalism*, 7 (2001), issue 4, about archaeology and nationalism.

⁷² See for instance Trigger 1984; see also the articles in Hodder 1982.

⁷³ See, for instance, Shanks and Tilly 1987. The conclusion to be drawn from this and other books by the same authors seems to be that the primary role of archaeology is to challenge authorities by using relativism to explode all claims on the past.

⁷⁴ For one recent and fierce attack on Western research on the Indian past, see Chakrabarti 1997. Chakrabarti asserts that Western Indology is based on racism and feelings of superiority (1 ff.).

older than other traditions. One could say that the religious traditions of India became rivals in the negotiation for prime historical status. History and archaeology took on a new and weighty meaning in debates about the relative status of the different religious traditions of the sub-continent. Religious leaders of the times were immersed in historical and archaeological arguments over the position of their respective traditions in the history of India and they often entered into alliances with Western scholars when their findings fit their schemes. Western scholars on their part were eager to contribute in the debate and found important allies and helpers in local leaders.

It is possible to argue that British hegemony — the very fact that India was a subjected continent — was expressed by the systematic collection and exhibition of Indian objects. Benedict Anderson has written about how three institutions in particular shaped the way in which the colonial powers imagined their dominions in Asia.⁷⁵ The three were the census, the map and the museum. The census provided an account of the constitution of the population, the map was a depiction of the colony as a geographical entity, and the museum laid out the history of the ancient kingdoms of the area. The colonial state presented itself as the guardian and master of the land, taking just as much pride in the glorious past and the exuberant nature of South Asia as any native. Learned societies revealed the literature and the archaeological treasures of India and made it available to the interested layman in London and Calcutta through mass publishing. In museums one could see strange and wonderful relics from tropical dominions.

The English used archaeology for nationalist purposes at least from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the Elgin Marbles, brought from Greece to the British Museum, became part of the construction of a Greek genealogy for the English people.⁷⁶ The English believed they were Greek, says A.S. Leoussi.⁷⁷ The English would never have believed they were Indian in any sense, although contemporary anthropology asserted the theory of Aryan kinship, but they were convinced they had the responsibility, as the enlightened race, to take care

⁷⁵ Anderson 1991:163ff.

⁷⁶ Leoussi 2001.

⁷⁷ Leoussi 2001:468.

of ancient Indian art. As Lord Curzon said in a speech about his policy on archaeology on 6 February 1900, shortly after he became Viceroy:

It is, in my judgment, equally our duty to dig and discover to classify, reproduce, and describe, to copy and decipher, and to cherish and conserve.⁷⁸

The worldview of British curators and orientalists had no place for the religious use of relics. The value of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna in the V&A Museum was of artistic and historical nature for the Museum authorities, as it had been for Maisey and Cunningham who discovered them in 1851.

The display of objects is often about power, as several writers have pointed out. Museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political, Benedict Anderson asserts in his treatment of colonial archaeology in Southeast Asia.⁷⁹ The South Kensington Museum, which would become the V&A Museum, was, from its establishment in 1857, meant to serve all strata of the British public; it was to be an instrument of public education (it was administered under the auspices of the Board of Education, as we have seen) and so marked a significant turning-point in the development of British Museum policy.⁸⁰ If we want to follow Anderson's line of thought, we might suggest that the display of Indian religious objects, like the relics, worked to organize the viewers into participants in the colonial enterprise, by letting them "take control" over the constituents of the Indian past as presented in the Museum, while at the same time giving them an aesthetically pleasurable experience through the sight of artifacts elevated into decontextualized *objets d'art*.

The contention over Indian archaeological artifacts in British Museums is still a cause of disputes. For instance, in April 2000, a major Indian newspaper carried an article about how the Victoria & Albert Museum had backed out of an agreement concerning an exhibition with the National Museum in New Delhi. The exhibition explored Sikh history through art from Ranjit Singh's Sikh kingdom in the Punjab. The Indian journalist

⁷⁸ Quoted in Chakrabarti 1988:121.

⁷⁹ Anderson 1991:178.

⁸⁰ Bennett 1995:70–71.

argued that the Victoria & Albert Museum was afraid that the invaluable treasures — like the golden throne and the Kohinoor diamond — would be claimed by India once they were on Indian soil.⁸¹ However, a number of countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and America have advanced similar claims. The Greek case is the most famous. From 1801 Lord Elgin, British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, removed large parts of the marble friezes and sculptures from the Acropolis and brought them to Britain, where they have been housed by the British Museum from 1816.⁸²

Sir David Wilson, the Director of the British Museum from 1977, wrote a book on the Museum in order to inform politicians, the media and the public, and to foster greater understanding of the goals and problems of the institution:

Our main difficulties lie in our very internationality. Understandably, some countries seeing objects from their own past in the British Museum, and in many other museums in the world, campaign for their return.⁸³

Such campaigns for the restitution of cultural objects are generally the results of sectarian or political considerations in different countries, according to Wilson. He goes on to discuss the cases of a Benin ivory mask wanted by a pan-African festival as well as the “long-running soap-opera regarding the Elgin Marbles.” His position is clear:

There are a number of reasons why we cannot contemplate the return of any part of our collections to the country of origin. . . . Our argument is not the childish idea expressed in the words ‘It’s mine’, rather it is the sense of curatorial responsibility, of holding material in trust for mankind throughout the foreseeable future.⁸⁴

The general questions of the return of cultural objects still cause problems for Western museums and they will undoubtedly continue to do so as the significance of tradition and history grows in response to the challenges of globalization.

⁸¹ Sengupta 2000.

⁸² The standard account of the story is St Clair 1998.

⁸³ Wilson 1989:112.

⁸⁴ Wilson 1989:116.

Conclusion

I have looked at the modern history of the relics of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, the two chief disciples of the Buddha. By going through the letters and minutes in the archives of the V&A Museum in London, I have reconstructed the history of these relics from their discovery by Cunningham and Maisey at Sānchī until their being handed over to the Maha Bodhi Society, taken on a tour of Asia and, finally, re-enshrined in India. I have tried to show that the handing back of the relics was a complex process involving Museum authorities, British government, Buddhist organizations and Indian politicians. The decision came after decades of arguing and lobbying and was not the result of a generous offer made by the British to their former colonial subjects. In fact, the V&A Museum would probably still be in the possession of the relic caskets had the Maha Bodhi Society accepted the plaster copies offered them at first. The primary concern of this article has been to reconstruct the struggle between the parties over the relics of two Buddhist saints, but the significance of this story becomes clear when we put it in its right contexts. Firstly, I tried to show that the quarrel over relics was an important part of the revival of Buddhism that transformed the religion from the end of the nineteenth century. Secondly, I argued that the relics of the two saints were used by the government of India to legitimate state power.

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The Phrygian Background of Kybele

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Abstract

The cult of Kybele is well known from Greek and Roman sources and well-described in most modern literature on antique religions. The cult, however, is primarily known in its Roman version, which differs greatly from the cult in the ancient Phrygian homeland of Kybele. This article presents the latest research on this subject: iconography and roles, attendants relating to the goddess, cult places, rituals and worship, and transference of the cult from Phrygia to Greece.

The Phrygian goddess, characterised by features of wild nature, was represented primarily by predatory birds, and she was worshipped in mountainous settings. Instead of portraying her as a typical Mother goddess associated with nature, fertility and procreation, new research has argued that her status as a Mother derives from her connection to the king, thus being the mother of the state and the throne. It is also maintained in the article that Attis is a late, Greek invention, and that the cult in Phrygia did not take the form of a mystery religion. In conclusion, it is suggested that the Black sea area played a role in the development and the dissemination of the cult.

Keywords

Kybele, Phrygia, Black Sea, Attis, mystery religions

Introduction

Kybele, Meter Oreia, Meter Theôn, Mater Deum Magna Idaea; these are some of the most commonly used Greek and Latin names for the goddess with the Phrygian name of Matar — *Mother*. A goddess forming a divine couple with her lover, Attis, she was the centre of a worship characterised by raging orgies, bloody self castration, loud music

inducing ecstasy and madness, taurobolia, and effeminate priests in colourful clothes. This roughly drawn picture is found in much literature; it is, however, a description of the cult mainly in Roman times, and it differs greatly from the knowledge that we now possess of the goddess in her homeland, Phrygia.¹

The cult of Matar (or Kybele, as she is most frequently called in the *History of Religions*) has been thoroughly studied in the past century, but generally with a geographical focus on Greece and Rome and a chronological focus on the Hellenistic-Roman age, with special attention to the mystery religion aspects of the cult. Aside from an erroneous description of the early Phrygian cult as a result of applying to it much later Greek and Roman characteristics,² other problematic issues are present in some studies by scholars of religion. One is the question of Matar's background. Robertson (1996:240, 246) refers to her as an age-old Greek goddess, also known as Rhea, claiming that the Anatolian traits of the religion were brought to Greece at a later period, during the 4th century. Other works (see below) describe Matar as an heir of the universal, primordial Great Mother, or identify her with Kubaba, another Anatolian goddess. In consequence, Matar is defined by the various characteristics drawn from these alleged predecessors. The opposite attitude is found in Borgeaud, who states: "Phrygia remains for the most part unattainable outside of its mediation through the Greek perspective" (1996:3).

With this article, I hope to present the latest research on the subject in order to balance these two different perspectives. Since the cult of the Hellenistic-Roman Kybele³ is an essential, perhaps even obligatory, part of teaching or studying the subject of "mystery religions" or "Hellenistic religions," a deeper knowledge of the Phrygian background of this goddess will provide an understanding of the profound degree to which her cult had been transformed, and contribute to a revised view of the characteristics of the Hellenistic-Roman cult. An awareness of this historical development may also serve as a frame of reference when dealing,

¹ This research has been sponsored by the Danish National Research Foundation.

² Some of the most well-known Graeco-Roman features, like the emasculated Attis, the mystery rituals, the lions, and the tympanon, are not part of her Phrygian cult.

³ See the paragraph below on her name.

more generally, with the question of the transformations of the so-called Oriental cults spreading through the Graeco-Roman world.

The very illuminating and thorough book by Lynn Roller⁴ from 1999, *In Search of God the Mother*, pays special attention to Matar's cult and iconography in Phrygia. This book, and the growing interest among archaeologists and historians in the background of this goddess since the publication of the book, has resulted in new and important knowledge, but has also raised new problems. In this article, I will discuss these unresolved issues as well as present the more secure knowledge that we now possess on Matar's cult. First of all, before turning to the Phrygian evidence, I will summarise — as a point of reference — some characteristics of the cult in Greece and Rome. Then, the article will proceed with Matar in Phrygia, including a short review of research on this subject and considering different aspects of the religion, such as Matar's iconography, the location of cult places, and other figures of the cult. Finally, I will turn to the question of how, and by whom, her cult spread outside of Phrygia. Even though my primary subject is the Phrygian evidence, I will also include references to the non-Phrygian features that were most distinct in the Greek and Roman versions of her cult, e.g., the presence of Attis and the attribute of the tympanon. Unless otherwise expressed, I will focus on the Paleo-Phrygian period (9th–7th centuries BC) when there was still no influence from the Greeks.

As for her name, Cybele is the Latin version of the Greek Kybele, whereas Meter is the Greek version of the Phrygian Matar, meaning mother. *Matar* occurs in 10 inscriptions from Phrygia, twice with the epithet *Kubileya* (“of the mountain”),⁵ from which the Greek and Latin personal names are derived. She is mentioned once with the epithet *areyastin* of unknown meaning, though a possible connection with a similar Hittite word (*ariya-*) might suggest that it is related to oracles and divination (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:106). In this article I will use the name Matar when dealing with the Phrygian roots of the goddess and the name Kybele outside of Phrygia since this is how she is most commonly referred to in the literature.

⁴ Professor of Archaeology, Art History and Classical studies, University California of Davis.

⁵ Most probably as a natural feature in a landscape, not a specific mountain (Roller 1999:68).

Greece and Rome

The cult of Kybele is probably known in Ionia by the mid 7th century BC⁶ and in mainland Greece by the mid 6th century BC.⁷ From the beginning of her entry to the Greek world, she is represented seated on a throne. In Athens, she very quickly assimilates with Demeter and Rhea, from whom she gets her new role as Mother of the Gods, *Meter Theôn*, her most common Greek name.⁸ In this way she becomes the source of life and, more specifically, the mother of the Olympian gods. She is frequently associated with and worshipped together with Dionysos, either as a *consequence* of similar rites, or perhaps through a Greek identification of a common homeland for Dionysos and Kybele, thus *causing* an adoption of his ecstatic rites. At any rate, a passage in Pindar (*Pyth.* 3.77–79) seems to indicate that nightly rituals were part of her worship by then.

By the 5th century, the representations of the Greek Kybele had become fairly standard, varying only in details: a seated goddess, dressed in Greek clothes, sometimes wearing a *polos* (a tall headdress) or a veil, or both, and holding in her hands a *phiale* (a libation bowl) and a tympanon.⁹ One or two lions are always present, either lying in her lap or standing by one or both sides of the throne — sometimes she even uses a lion as a footstool. She was worshipped in the Athenian *agora* and a few other, public places, but otherwise mostly in private shrines (Roller 1999:139), and her worship was, to some degree, linked to the rites of Dionysos and Pan and accompanied by loud, ecstasy-inducing music and wild dance (Roller 1999:143, 149). Her official role as a guardian

⁶ This early date is inferred from the find of a shard in Southern Italy (Lokri) inscribed with the name Kubala and dating from the late 7th century. The cult was most probably brought there by emigrants from Colophon in Ionia, which means that the cult must have come to Colophon even earlier than the late 7th century BC (Graf 1984:120).

⁷ I generally use the term *cult* when it is clear that some kind of worship has taken place, either related to an image of the goddess, which may be seen by finds of offerings on the spot, or because specific features, like altars, benches, marked stones, worked rocks, niches, cup-marks, or basins, are found in connection with monuments.

⁸ This name is the most commonly used in the epigraphic material, whereas *Kybele* is preferred in literary sources.

⁹ I will return to the tympanon below.

of democracy and justice can be deduced from the location of her first *metroon* (her shrine) in the *agora* in the same building as the *bouleuterion*. Slowly, during the 5th century BC, a negative attitude towards this foreign goddess emerges. It coincides with a general tendency of growing anti-orientalism, but, ironically, the very features used to point to her foreign nature — the tympana, castanets, cymbals and lions — are not, or very rarely, to be found in her Phrygian iconography (cf. below).

She possesses formidable, awesome, magical powers. People come to her to seek vengeance or justice, and she can possess individuals with madness or illness, or cure them from disease (Borgeaud 1996:27ff.; Roller 1999:156). The sources do not reveal to us why private people worshipped her, but some votives and inscriptions suggest that she was also seen as a protector and nurturer of the sick, mothers and children — a *kourotrophos* (Roller 1999:158). Generally, she is characterised by this dual nature of unpredictable power and beneficent qualities, and the sources reveal an equally dual status in Greek society: she was at once one of the most detested and most beloved of the divinities worshipped by the Greeks.

The goddess was brought to Rome from Asia Minor in 204 BC by state officials in response to a statement in the Sibylline Books that the transference of the Great Mother was the only way to ensure a Roman victory in the Punic wars. *Mater Deum Magna Idaea*, the Great Idaean Mother of the Gods (Kybele's most common public title in Rome) was from the beginning an official goddess, the state representatives being closely associated with her cult, unlike the situation in Greece where the finds suggest a worship of primarily private character. A few years after her arrival, she received a temple on the Palatine Hill. In Rome, Kybele enjoyed great popularity among the lay people, but the worship was practiced most frequently as a part of public processions. This is a result of the almost immediate transformation of the goddess into a Roman deity, the rituals and festivals consequently being of a purely Roman, official character (Roller 1999:279).

The goddess was certainly more popular in Rome than in Greece, and this is probably due to the following circumstances: First of all, she was received as a goddess whose presence had been officially requested by the city's most renowned people. Secondly, she was credited with the honour of saving the Romans from the foreign invaders, led by Hannibal

(Roller 1999:267). In relation to this matter, she was relatively quickly connected with the myth of Aeneas, the Trojan “father” of Rome, and thus, in fact, associated with the establishment and the preservation of the entire empire. Furthermore, as a consequence of being portrayed as a patriotic, Roman goddess, her foreign elements, e.g., her relations with nature, mountains and rural landscapes, were toned down; she became a distinctively urban goddess and was increasingly represented with a sceptre replacing the tympanon as her standard attribute. In other areas (related to the abovementioned features), the Romans adopted, and even emphasised — in their frequent representations of Kybele with a mural crown — a Phrygian feature of Matar, namely her clear, yet un-accentuated role as a city protector.¹⁰ In Rome, Kybele was also particularly connected to fecundity and sexuality (Roller 1999:280), which is attested not only by a number of votives representing fertility symbols such as breasts, genitals and lovemaking couples, but also in the fact that the popularity of Attis grew greatly in the Roman period. These features can probably explain why the literary sources exhibit such a great amount of disdain of the cult, seemingly a contradiction to the archaeological records confirming the cult’s popularity.

Phrygia

Having thus presented the most general outlines of the Greek and Roman development of the cult of Kybele, admittedly not including all the important factors, I will now return to Matar in Phrygia. This land covered in the 8th century BC a large part of Western Anatolia, reaching from the southern shore of the Marmara in the north to Lycia in the south, and extending from her neighbours to the west, the Lydians and Ionians, to the Halys River in the east. The Phrygians were said by Herodotos (VII, 73) to be immigrants from Thrace settling in Anatolia. According to modern theories, this would be in the late Bronze age, between the 12th and the 10th centuries BC.

If it is a fact that the Phrygians were descendants of Thracians and brought their cult and religion with them, then the knowledge that we

¹⁰ In Phrygia, she was never portrayed with a mural crown.

possess of the cult and religion in the Thracian region could illuminate the nature of Matar in Phrygia. Convincing arguments for the existence of certain similarities between the religions of the two regions are found in Roller 2002 and 2003. The evidence that speak for a connection between the areas is, among other things, the presence of comparable rock-cut niches and other similar rock-cut structures, suggesting a similar kind of divinity worshipped in mountainous areas. Furthermore, the king in the Thracian area may have engaged in a relationship with a goddess, including a *hieros gamos* and serving as a reinforcement of his power, a situation similar to that in Phrygia, and perhaps surviving there. Another common feature between the Phrygians and the Thracians seems to be a preference for a superior female, quite anonymous deity. These are all interesting points, and a further investigation of the cult in the Thracian area would be valuable in this connection.

Earlier Research on Matar in Anatolia

At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a growing interest in the study of Matar, as can be seen in the works of, e.g., Cumont (1906), Graillot (1912) and Hepding (1903). Apart from being limited by a lack of the material that we have today, the work of these scholars is characterised by their primary emphasis on the Greek and Roman cults, Phrygia being mentioned only to explain its “foreign” traits. Moreover, they are clearly marked by the prejudices of their time when expressing the barbaric and savage nature of the Anatolians compared to the civilised Greeks and Romans, a prejudice in fact dating back to antiquity itself. Shortly before that time, in the second half of the 19th century, a series of excavations were undertaken in Anatolia, which in the years to follow introduced the researchers to some of the Phrygian characteristics of the Mother.¹¹ Later, these were supplemented by the finds made by archaeologists like Mellaart, Helck, Young, Bittel and Haspels (Naumann 1983:16). Especially the two first mentioned had a strong impact on the theory of the universal Great Mother Goddess, to which

¹¹ G. and A. Körte in 1895, Ramsay in 1895, Reber and Brandenburg in 1906 (Naumann 1983:15).

I will return later. Albright (1928–29) was the first modern scholar to argue that the Neo-Hittite goddess Kubaba was the ancestress of Matar. A collection of material on Matar in Phrygia was published by Vermaseren in the first volume of *Corpus Cultus Cybelae Attidisque* (Vermaseren 1987). His book on the cult of Kybele and Attis (Vermaseren 1977) also contains some thoughts on their Phrygian background, and there he repeats the usual presumptions of the researchers of this field: Matar is the direct heir of the Neolithic fertility goddess, and the origin of Attis was Phrygian.

If many of the earlier misconceptions and prejudices about the cult in Phrygia could be explained by the lack of material, this was remedied by Naumann's comprehensive book from 1983 in which, based on her catalogue of finds from Asia Minor to Greece, she describes the development of the iconography of Matar from early Phrygian to late Hellenistic times. Isik's articles primarily deal with the directions of influence in the Anatolian area, focusing on and arguing for, among other things, the Urartian influence on Phrygia, and on the Phrygian influence on Ionian art (Isik 1986–1987). Vassileva (e.g., 2001) and Naydenova (1990) have also studied the connections between Thrace and Phrygia, as has Roller in an article in 2003. In her book from 1999, Roller analyses the Anatolian material and writes a thorough and well-documented narrative on the history and development of the cult of the Anatolian Mother Goddess.¹² She illustrates the lines of development from the Anatolian *Matar* through the Greek *Meter Theôn* to the Roman *Magna Mater*. Furthermore, she makes a convincing case in refuting the thesis that has prevailed from antiquity to modern times, that all the untamed, ecstatic and "uncivilised" aspects of the cult, as we know it in Roman society, were an original part of the cult in Anatolia. Roller also raises the fundamental question: Of what or whom was Matar the mother? Before I take up this and other unresolved issues, and recent research dealing with these, I will summarise the facts that are largely agreed upon today: who was she? And more importantly: who was she not?

¹² See also Roller 1991, 1994, 2002.

Earlier Theories on Matar in Phrygia

The earliest evidence of Matar comes from the early first millennium, as has been clearly shown by Lynn Roller (1999:1). However, there has not always been agreement on this subject, and it is still today often stated that the earliest evidence for the cult of Matar is considerably older.¹³ The disagreement stems first and foremost from two strands of opinions:

A Prehistoric, Universal Goddess

One is the view that Matar was but one of many forms of a single, pre-historic Mother Goddess.¹⁴ Research on “The Great Mother Goddess” has often been confusing, especially due to the lack of definition. Moreover, the still growing popularity of this supposedly primordial goddess among non-specialists (e.g., feminists, Wicca adherents, psychologists and transvestites) has cast a shadow of frivolity on the subject. According to this tradition, the worship of Matar goes back to “the dawn of time.” This theory claims that a female deity, Mother Earth, was the first divinity worshipped, a view that dates back to Hesiod (*Theogony*, 116–38). In modern times it was re-invented by Bachofen (1861), who explicitly connected this worship of a Mother Goddess with a primitive phase of human society, so that this first expression of religiosity was linked to (an immature) matriarchy.¹⁵

A slight modification of this belief appeared in E.O. James 1959, where he writes: “Whether or not the Mother Goddess was the earliest manifestation of the concept of deity, her symbolism unquestionably has been the most persistent feature in the archaeological record of the ancient world” (James 1959:11). According to James, the cradle land of the Mother Goddess was the Southern Russian steppe and Western Asia, from where (from the time of Upper Palaeolithic to the Christian era) it

¹³ Followers of this theory are known today as the Goddess Movement, and they hold variants of the opinion that Mother Goddess worship was the first kind of religion, as well as the modified conviction that all goddesses are different manifestations of a single Mother deity. Recent examples: Getty 1990; Gimbutas 2001; Gimbutas and Dexter 1999; Robertson 1996; Roscoe 1996.

¹⁴ See also Borgeaud 1996 (preface) for a refutation of this theory.

¹⁵ Bachofen 1975:98–99. See also Borgeaud 1994–95 on Bachofen and Kybele.

spread throughout the world, from India to the Mediterranean, eventually developing into the different religions and divinities familiar to us from this area.¹⁶ In other words, the divine figures known to us as, e.g., Aphrodite, *Potnia Therôn* or the Virgin Mother Mary are hypostases of this single unity, the Mother Goddess (cf. also Vermaseren 1977:10). According to James, the process of this development started with the rise of agriculture as well as of the human species' growing consciousness of the duality and necessity of male and female in the generative process. Due to the circumstance that she was no longer the *Unmarried Mother*, she became associated with the *Young God* as her son or consort, hence producing, among others, the divine couple of Matar and Attis. Having thus explained the nature of religion as a basic question of Procreation, Life and Death, James accordingly, and in complete agreement with almost all other research before and at his time, regarded the emergence of Attis (the male consort of Graeco-Roman Kybele) as contemporary with that of Kybele herself.¹⁷ However, as Roller demonstrates, there is no divine Attis until Hellenistic and Roman times,¹⁸ and Matar was certainly not a traditional fertility goddess, a fact also noticeable in the absence of ordinary fertility symbols, such as ears of corn or children. Instead, her most persistent iconographical features are those of power: she is presented as a figure who controls nature, protects cities, and is accompanied only by predatory animals (Roller 1999:38).

The archaeological finds of nude female figurines that have traditionally been interpreted as Mother Goddesses have been seen as proofs of the universal goddess theory. This, however, is not an unproblematic understanding. First of all, it has been naturally assumed that the figurines are to be interpreted in a religious context, even though the finding contexts, e.g., rubbish dumps or household deposits, might suggest a variety of other possible functions, like teaching devices, toys, servant figures etc. (Roller 1999:15). On the official website of Catalhöyük, Ian Hodder and Sharina Farid inform us that a certain kind of figurines

¹⁶ James 1959:11–12. Cf. also Burkert 1987:6.

¹⁷ This assumption is repeated in the more recent books of Sfameni Gasparro 1985, Martin 1987, Meyer 1987 and Burkert 1987.

¹⁸ Roller 1994:247. I will return to this subject below.

(found in great numbers), always with their heads broken off, have up till now been classified as Mother Goddesses. Now, a new and complete find shows that they are bears, not women. Secondly, even if the statuettes should be regarded as cultic artifacts, this does not necessarily imply a Mother Goddess cult,¹⁹ especially considering the fact that most of the figurines have no indications of gender,²⁰ that a large minority of male figures have also been found, and that the women are young as well as old, slim as well as corpulent.

Matar and Kubaba

The other strand of research (though not necessarily unrelated to the former line of argument) is the hypothesis that Matar is essentially the same as Kubaba, an old Hittite goddess.²¹ The identification of the two goddesses is not a modern idea, but goes back to the ancient Greeks, and is caused, among other things, by the similarity of the names Kybebe (the Hellenised form of Kubaba) and Kybele (Brixhe 1979:40ff.). In the second millennium BC, this goddess, who is first mentioned in cuneiform texts from the 17th or 16th century BC, was a minor deity in a large pantheon, but at the beginning of the first millennium BC, she rose to a status of primary female divinity in the Neo-Hittite centres, particularly in Karkemish,²² and later also prominent in the city of Sardis. She is characterised in representations as sitting or standing, always in profile, and often in a triad with two male gods. Her main attributes are a mirror and a pomegranate and, in Karkemish, ears of corn, all of which define her as a fertility goddess as well as a “Schöne Frau.”²³ Her clothes (*polos*, veil and mantle), the occasionally attending

¹⁹ See Hodder and Farid 2005. For an enlightening summary of the positions in the discussion, see Hodder 2006a.

²⁰ Hodder 2006a. See also Hodder 2006b:213.

²¹ This theory was first expressed by Albright 1928–29, then repeated in numerous works, such as Laroche 1960; Diakonoff 1977; Vermaseren 1977b; *Reallexikon der Assyriologie* 6:264; Naumann 1983. In *LIMC*, the theory of Matar as a prehistoric goddess, and the link between Kubaba and Matar, is also asserted (see under “Kybele,” first paragraph).

²² Roller 1999:44. See also Bittel on Kubaba in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, and Naumann 1983:17–38.

²³ Naumann 1983:36. That is, representative of beauty, like the Greek Aphrodite.

animals, lions, leopards or bulls, and the texts furthermore represent her as Queen of Heaven and Mistress of animals.

Apart from the representational differences, Brixhe concludes on purely linguistic grounds that Kybele and Kubaba are not the same, and that Kybele cannot be viewed as an alteration of Kubaba (Brixhe 1979:45). While the similarities of the iconography of Kubaba and Matar are certainly present (i.e., in clothing, the occasional appearance of attending lions, the pomegranate as well as the resemblance of names), the differences are notably deeper, as Roller demonstrates:²⁴ Kubaba was not a Mother Goddess, a primary role for Matar (cf. her Phrygian name, *Mother*). While Kubaba is constantly seen in profile, sometimes standing, sometimes enthroned, Matar is always depicted frontally in a standing pose. The differences in main attributes and hence main roles are also striking: Matar's constant companion is the predatory bird designating hunting, while Kubaba's mirror indicates femininity. In addition to this, there is a difference in the primary location of cult places: even though Matar could be worshipped in a variety of settings, e.g., funerary and urban contexts, the rural areas are of great importance (most often in mountains, sometimes near a spring), while the reliefs of Kubaba come almost entirely from court or other urban contexts. Last but not least, in Phrygian cult reliefs, Matar is always represented as standing in the doorway of her house, which is never the case for Kubaba. We can thus conclude that the iconography of Kubaba has influenced the Phrygian representations of Matar, but she was not her predecessor.

Iconography and Roles of Matar

Apart from the features of the Phrygian representations of Matar mentioned above, the following characteristics can be attributed to her. She is the only Phrygian goddess shown iconographically in an anthropomorphic form. The traditional way of representing Matar had been

²⁴ Cf. Roller 1999:45–53. Furthermore, it can be added that these points of resemblance are by no means restricted to Kubaba and Matar (a *polos* and a veil are common attributes of divinity, the pomegranate also comes with many other fertility goddesses, lions accompany the *potnia therôn*, etc.), but rather indicates a similarity in roles.

formed under the influence of the Hittites, the Neo-Hittites, and the Urartians, at the end of the 8th century BC, from which time it more or less remained traditional until the 6th century BC, when Greek influence becomes apparent. Above all, she is represented as a goddess of the wild and untamed nature, living in the mountains and surrounding herself with wild animals such as the predatory bird, lions or even fantasy creatures, like sphinxes.²⁵

Normally, she wears a *polos* from which a veil is hanging down, covering her hair. Her attributes differ slightly from the regions of central Phrygia to the Highlands in the west, the most significant elements being drinking vessels, bowls and occasionally lions — in Western Phrygia — while predatory birds are a persistent attribute in Central Phrygia. Birds of prey were often seen as divine attributes in the Hittite religion (Roller 1999:43).

Tympanon

One of Matar's best known Greek attributes is the *tympanon*. It enters the Greek iconography of Kybele in the late 6th century and is mentioned in literature at probably the same time.²⁶ It has no precedents in images from Phrygia, but is seen in Assyria, the Neo-Hittite centres of South-Eastern Anatolia, and in the Greek area on Cyprus and Crete, where they were related to the cult of Rhea (Roller 1999:137, 173). The *tympanon*²⁷ is seen on a representation of musicians dancing for Kubaba in Karkemisch (Naumann 1983:28). This need not cause the rejection of the theory that Kubaba was not the predecessor of Matar; it can simply be explained by the fact that the Greeks, who did in fact understand Matar as Kubaba,²⁸ may have borrowed the instruments of Kubaba, assuming that they belonged to Kybele. The earliest Lydian

²⁵ In the city of Etlik, see Roller 1999:74. This is not an unusual phenomenon in the neighbouring cultures in the Anatolian area.

²⁶ Despite its Archaic style, the Homeric hymn to *Meter Theôn* is probably to be dated to the last quarter of the 6th century BC (Roller 1999:123).

²⁷ Together with cymbals, double flute and lyre. These are the very instruments mentioned in the Greek sources, see Roller 1999:151, n.21. Cf. also the instruments played by Matar's Boğazköy attendants, mentioned below.

²⁸ The early Greek name *Κυβέβη* is, among other things, a Hellenised form of Kubaba (Roller 1999:124).

representations of Matar/Kybele, who was a mixture of Greek Kybele, Phrygian Matar and Kubaba, show no instances of the tympanon, an observation which thus probably contradicts the theory that the tympanon came from this area.

The presence of the tympanon in the rites of the Cretan Rhea (explained mythologically as the instruments used by the Kouretes to create loud music for baby Zeus), and the representation of this instrument in Cretan iconography already in the 8th century BC, offer another plausible background for the Greek connection of the tympanon with Kybele (Roller 1999:170–74). The Greeks, who conflated Kybele and Rhea at least from the mid 6th century, may have transferred Rhea's symbols to Kybele, perhaps due to the recognition of a similarity of rituals connected to these goddesses, causing an identification of Kybele and Rhea. This theory fits with the chronology of the archaeological evidence, i.e., evidence for an assimilation of Rhea and Kybele in the mid-6th century, and the first iconographical representations of tympana at the end of the 6th century. However, the earliest example of Kybele with a tympanon is from the Western coast of the Black Sea (mid-6th century: Alexandrescu Vianu 1980), then Thasos, Phokaia and Ephesos (early 5th century: Salviat 1964:248; Naumann 1983:136), i.e., from the Ionian cultural sphere. This circumstance points to Ionia (from where the Greek cities of the Black sea coast was primarily colonised), or the Black Sea itself, as a place of origin, and correspondingly, to the reflection that the cult may have been of a peculiar kind in this area.

Aniconic Idols

Aside from the anthropomorphic representations, several aniconic idols of Matar have also been found, in either single or double versions.²⁹ The earliest of these idols probably date back to ca. 950–830 BC (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:158), which makes them considerably older than the anthropomorphic representations of Matar. The circumstance that the

²⁹ It has generally been interpreted as a double version of Matar; this is also a characteristic trait of other religions, especially the Greek. It might symbolise two different aspects of the divinity: it may double the force of the deity, or it may represent two related deities. However, Berndt-Ersöz suggests that this is not the case for the Phrygian idols, see below.

Phrygians originally worshipped their goddess in an aniconic fashion, may be a further indication of the similarities between the Phrygians and the Thracians who before being influenced by the Greeks never depicted their goddess anthropomorphically. I will return to the interpretation of the idols in the next section.

Whose Mother is Matar?

Given that only one or two statues of Matar represent her in the company of children,³⁰ the question remains: of what is she the mother? Finding support in interpretations of inscriptions and in cult locations (in the cities often on or in connection with the city walls and elaborate, expensive buildings), and in the fact that the king was most likely intimately connected to her worship, Roller thinks that Matar was the mother of the State and throne, a feature also surviving in the Greek mainland, where her *metroon*, as mentioned above, was first located in the *bouleuterion* in the *agora*.³¹ Mark Munn (2006), who attempts to explain the apparent paradox why the archives of the Athenian democracy were located in a temple dedicated to a non-Greek goddess, agrees with this theory and supports it by discussing the concept of the tyrant copulating with a Goddess in order to secure his future power.³² There are, however, no sources from Athens to support a theory of a *hieros gamos* in the *agora*. That Kybele was present in the *agora* as a result of her role as a Mother of the State, is certainly likely. The idea, however, of a *hieros gamos* in the *agora* is purely theoretical and less convincing,

³⁰ Even the best example has not been proven beyond doubt to represent Matar, see Roller 1999:104, fig. 35. Even though Roller mentions that it may be influenced by the cult of Leto, she still refers to the statue as Matar on account of the notable similarity in pose and costume. In my opinion, though, there is no indication that this is in fact Matar. Besides, given the fact that Matar's dress was an ordinary piece of clothing, this would be how they would represent any deity. Only if we know for sure that it can represent no other deity, can we conclude anything from this picture, but since this is a circular argument leading to a much wider discussion, I will leave it at this.

³¹ Borgeaud 1996:28, explains this as a result of Matar's dual identity in Classical Greece — one as the ancient Greek, anonymous Mother Earth, the other as a specific foreign deity from Phrygia.

³² As does Roller in her article from 2002 about rulership and the Great goddess in Thrace.

but need not be employed to substantiate this role. Whether a role as Mother of the State is unrelated to or has influenced Kybele's function as a protector of Justice in the *agora* (an important function, which Borgeaud interprets as the result of a conflation between the Phrygian Mother and an ancient Greek goddess of Justice), remains an open question.

Roller's theory also involves the figure of Attis: she believes that Attis was a royal name, like Midas, and that the king had sacred obligations. Based on evidence from Hellenistic Phrygia, where Attis is actually the title of the High priest, and assuming that this function (i.e., high priest) would be the only remnant of an earlier sacred kingship (under the names of Midas and Attis) in a time when Phrygia had lost its independence, she then proposes the theory that Matar enjoyed common worship with the king, a king to be regarded as divine. Since other circumstances indicate that Matar was indeed regarded as the protector of the state (Roller 1999:111), she could have joined in a *hieros gamos* with the king in Phrygia, thus reinforcing his authority. This would eventually lead the Greeks to confuse this divine priest-king/high priest with a god, thus creating Attis (Roller 1999:70, 112).

In general, Matar's character seems to be that of a protective, powerful goddess, expressing with her predatory birds a helpful and positive, rather than fearful, character — predatory birds being viewed as helpers of human beings in the hunt.

Attendants Relating to the Cult

Attis

Though there is no consensus in research on the existence of Attis in Phrygia,³³ Roller nevertheless presents a convincing theory, namely that

³³ The main argument, e.g., in Vermaseren 1977b, is the story of Croesus and his son Atys, besides the mere assumption that the ancient myths must reflect a much older tradition. Roller refers me to Baumeister 1860, who originally presented this argument. Cf. also Sfameni Gasparro 1985:26, who, realising the late appearance of references to Attis, explains this by the fact that it was simply too abhorrent for the Greeks to accept his existence. For further reading, Lancellotti 2002 (in particular 1–61) gives a thorough account of the research positions on this subject.

there was no divine Attis in the Phrygian period (see above, and Roller 1994). Her arguments are that no iconographic representations have been found before 350 BC (in Piraeus), and that all the literary evidence is equally late. Moreover, the name Attis is given twice in the inscriptions as the donator, not the receiver of dedications (Roller 1999:111). The reference to Atys in Herodotus offers no real reason to assume the opposite, since this was in fact the most ordinary and widespread name in Phrygia (Roller 1999:70), and since Atys in Herodotus has little in common with the Attis of the later Hellenistic myths.

A Male Companion?

Whereas it seems reasonable to say that the god Attis was a Hellenistic development, the assertion of Roller that Matar was the only divinity represented in Phrygia is still being discussed.³⁴ Berndt-Ersöz argues that the small attendants playing the musical instruments are to be viewed as gods (Berndt-Ersöz 2004) and that in Phrygia a male superior god actually did exist, who is represented in the double idols and was later identified with Zeus. In a detailed line of argument, based on epigraphical and iconographical evidence, Berndt-Ersöz comes to the following conclusions: The superior male god, portrayed aniconically in the double idols, is actually to be seen in the (relatively frequent) occurrences of images of bulls from the earliest to later Phrygian times, not normally related to Matar by scholars. This god was equal to her in status. The most likely god to be represented as a bull would be a Phrygian equivalent of the Hittite Weather god or the Greek Zeus, both of which are represented as bulls (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:205). Berndt-Ersöz does not mention Dionysos in this connection, but the two gods primarily associated with bulls in Greece were in fact Dionysos and Zeus, the very gods who, above all, were connected to early Greek Kybele.

In search of epigraphical support for her theory, Berndt-Ersöz turns to the evidence of the cult of Zeus Papas, i.e., Father, a cult specifically found in Asia Minor from the Hellenistic age. The Anatolian word for father was *atta*, and in the Hittite language *atta-* was also used for the

³⁴ However, it needs to be specified that it is not a matter of believing that the Phrygians were monotheistic, but that we do not have *iconographical* representations of any other deities in the Phrygian material (Roller 1999:108).

Father of the gods or Father god. *Ata* is a word in the (still not deciphered) Phrygian language, occurring in several Phrygian graffiti and inscriptions, most of them with religious significance.³⁵ One inscription is clearly a dedication to *Ata*. As a reference, Berndt-Ersöz uses an image of the bull, i.e., the weather god, placed next to a representation of an anthropomorphic, female divinity on a relief from the Hittite period in a manner reminiscent of two later Phrygian images of the bull and Matar from Gordion, the Phrygian capital. Accordingly, she proposes that *Ata* actually was the Phrygian male superior god, *Ata* simply meaning Father, just as Matar means Mother. When Phrygia became Hellenised, *Ata* was identified with Zeus, but in some areas he kept his original name, Father, in a Greek form, *Papas*.

While Berndt-Ersöz, based on the above arguments, refuses the idea that this god, *Ata*, has anything to do with the later Greek *Attis*, it is my opinion that, even though *Attis* may not be directly derived from *Ata*, there may still be a linguistic unity behind them; the fact that *Attis*/*Atys* (and other spelling variants) was the most common personal name in Phrygia, and that it was also a royal and perhaps also a high priestly name, may perhaps be explained by a common source in the very name of *Ata*, the superior god. We should also bear in mind that the existence of personal names derived from a divine name is a well known occurrence in many cultures. Finally, it should be mentioned that, according to Diodoros and Arrian, *Baba/Papas* was an alternative name for *Attis*, and in the later Roman cult was an epithet of the Phrygian Zeus (Roller 1999:70, n.45).

Even though we should be very cautious about regarding later sources as evidence of earlier circumstances, I nevertheless find this theory convincing, since it provides a good explanation for some of the previously unresolved problems, such as the apparent structure behind the appearance of single and double idols,³⁶ respectively, and the phenomenon (and perhaps also the nature) of the *Papas* cult in that area. Furthermore, it helps explain the fact that Matar was represented in the company of Zeus (and a young, male god) in a series of later reliefs from

³⁵ Inferred mainly from their locations, Berndt-Ersöz 2003:207.

³⁶ Only the double idols, never the single ones (with one exception), were found in connection with step monuments; see Berndt-Ersöz 2003:74.

Ephesos. These are unique, partly because they represent Matar together with a male god equal to her in height, and hence in status, and partly because she is shown in a standing pose, that is, in the Phrygian manner, which is hardly ever the case after the 6th century BC in the Greek world.³⁷ The epigraphical evidence from Ephesos affirms the identification of the bearded god as Zeus, with the epithet *Patroios*.³⁸ Whether or not the existence of a male *paredros* is regarded as a satisfactory theory, it still remains unclear why Matar is so prominent in our sources, i.e., why is she the only deity represented?

Roller is not convinced by the thesis of *Ata* as her male *paredros*, but she nevertheless proposes a theory of Matar's prominence that actually does not exclude the existence of *Ata*. As a supporter of the theory of the Thracian-Phrygian migration around the 10th century BC, Roller believes that the Phrygians, after their settlement in Anatolia, slowly built up a powerful royal dynasty,³⁹ a theory supported by archaeological excavations in Gordion.⁴⁰ This dynasty, or perhaps even an individual king, needed a divine protector to support the dynasty's or his own position of power (cf. the paragraph above on Matar as mother, and Munn 2006). A divine mother would be a powerful symbol for a male elite, and a claim of special protection from her would reinforce their position of dominance. This historical development would also explain the fact that Matar was only represented in anthropomorphic form at a relatively late date, i.e., not until the Phrygian dynasty was so developed that it became necessary to employ the anthropomorphic images that the neighbouring cultures — the Neo-Hittites and the Urartians — were used to. This corresponds also with the fact that the gods of the Thracians, too, were not represented anthropomorphically until they met other cultures — the Greeks, in their case.

³⁷ The Ionian Greeks introduced the image of a seated goddess, which very quickly became the standard representation.

³⁸ Vikela 2001:108ff. Vikela comments on these Ephesian types, but refrains from drawing any conclusions, stating only that, "...auf welche mythologische Beziehung (diese Dreiverein) sich gründet, bleibt unklar. Jedenfalls muss er aus einheimischen Vorstellungen entstanden sein" (110).

³⁹ The theory is described in her 2003 article.

⁴⁰ Sams 1994:xxxi, 20; Muscarella 1995:91, Laszlo 1998:41.

Eunuch Priests

Other figures relating to the cult are seen occasionally, one perhaps of a eunuch priest.⁴¹ On a relief from Boğazköy, Matar is accompanied by two small attendants playing the flute and lyre, and in Gordion, two small figures have also been found near a Matar shrine. There is disagreement as to how much knowledge can be drawn from these, but it is safe to say that they are all smaller than the goddess, male youths and represented with objects like bowls and musical instruments. Whether or not they represent other deities is a question of debate. The existence of eunuch priests in Phrygia is difficult to prove, but it is worth bearing in mind that a considerable number of eunuchs were employed in the courts of the Oriental kings, so they were not an unprecedented phenomenon in the area.⁴² The evidence for ritual castration in Anatolia is quite vague, though, and defies the idea that this was a predominant feature of the Mother's cult in Phrygia — most of the evidence comes from Rome. The term *gallos*, denoting a castrate priest of the Kybele cult, is first met with in Hellenistic times. Roller, as many with her, is of the opinion that the word derives from the *Galatians*, who inhabited the area of central Phrygia in Hellenistic times. Other possible sources have been suggested, for example a cock (lat. *gallus*) or a river named *Gallos*.⁴³ A common characteristic of the various suppositions is that they draw on relatively late material (3rd century BC and later), whether iconographical, mythological, historical or epigraphical evidence. The idea has also been proposed that the name *galloi* is derived from Sumeric *gallu*, meaning *in a woman's voice*,⁴⁴ an attractive theory that, if correct, speaks for a much older tradition of *galloi* than previously assumed. Last but not least, it should be mentioned that *gallos* could come from an indo-European word with the stem **ghel-*, in the sense

⁴¹ Roller 1999:105: one of the very few pieces of evidence within Anatolia of this type of priests.

⁴² Diakonoff 1977:338 who in a description of a Urartian document about king Rusa II mentions 3784 eunuchs among his personnel. Other possible sources of comparison could be the megabyzoi of Artemis in Ephesos, but this is not an undisputed fact, see Lane 1996:132.

⁴³ A river near Pessinous; Lane 1996:123ff.

⁴⁴ Borgeaud 1996:77–78; Roscoe 1996:195ff.; Hirschmann 2005:65–66.

of “cutting,” probably also present in the English *gelding* and Scandinavian *gilding*.⁴⁵

Lions

In contrast to the Greek and Roman cult, lions appear with Matar in Phrygia on just one, possibly two, representations from the pre-Greek period,⁴⁶ excluding other images of lions from Phrygia not directly related to her. In Phrygia, lions are depicted as huge, standing on their hind legs with their paws resting on Matar’s head (or on pillars, in the case of her absence).⁴⁷ Furthermore, there are *two* lions present in the Phrygian images, unlike the Graeco-Roman representations with between one and three lions. In images of lions without Matar, the lions are portrayed as protectors of tombs, and according to Berndt-Ersöz they are there either because the tombs are under the protection of Matar, or because they are symbols of the ruling class, both interpretations emphasising their role as apotropaic symbols (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:192) — in either case, the lions have no obvious relation to Matar.

Since there is clear evidence that Matar was closely related to the ruling elite class,⁴⁸ the presence of lions on the great tombs may nevertheless indicate a Phrygian connection between Matar and lions. If we accept that the lions are representatives of Matar, that would be yet another sign of her relation to tombs, albeit an indirect one like the other references pointing to this relationship.⁴⁹ On the other hand, we could also consider whether a common connection with graves was the

⁴⁵ This theory is proposed by George Hinge in a private e-mail.

⁴⁶ Berndt-Ersöz 2003:192. Besides the lions with Matar at Arslan Kaya, there is a step monument at Karahisar with animals that seem to be lions, on each side of a semi-circular disc (ibid. 70).

⁴⁷ Arslan Tas, Yılan Tas, and Midas City (the Pyramid Tomb), Roller 1999:102–3 and Berndt-Ersöz 2003:192.

⁴⁸ E.g., her affiliation with the king, and the presence of representations of Matar on the elaborate building structures (Roller 1999:111).

⁴⁹ I.e., by symbols possibly symbolising Matar, such as a rosette (Vassileva 2001:59), or a certain similarity between the rock-cut monuments and the tradition of carving tombs into natural rock (Roller 1999:102).

very factor that later caused the image of Matar to be related to lions. As noted above, there is one recorded instance of a connection between lions and Matar in Phrygia (at Arslan Kaya). This may indeed serve as evidence that the later and almost obligatory presence of lions in Greece merely reflects the Phrygian background. However, that they occur only once among the relatively big number of Matar representations may indicate other sources of influence. Roller suggests Lydia as a possible transitional factor between Phrygian and Ionian iconography (Roller 1999:131). A Lydian temple model of the early 6th century represents the Phrygian Matar in Greek style, flanked by snakes and lions. Lions were an important and frequent symbol of Lydian royalty, and perhaps the coupling of Matar with lions became a more permanent feature which may have influenced the adaptation of the lion by the Ionian Greeks, with whom they had strong connections. Rein offers another explanation for the presence of lions on Lydian coins and in the religious iconography, suggesting that the Lydians, being originally associated with the hawk as an animal symbol (Rein 1993:65), took over the lion from the Greek *Potnia Therôn*, thus interpreting the lions as a basically Greek feature. Bearing in mind the unquestionable connection of lions with Matar at Arslan Kaya, the probable presence of lions at Kalehisar and the fact that lions also occur elsewhere in Phrygia, it seems possible to conclude that the lions were a Phrygian feature, although the Phrygians obviously did not attach as much importance to them as did the Greeks and the Lydians.⁵⁰ As to the question why the Greeks credited this creature with such an enormous significance that it rapidly became a standard attribute of Kybele, despite its relatively small place in Phrygian iconography, the answer may simply be a matter of recognition. In Phrygia, Matar enjoyed iconographical supremacy, even monopoly, whereas the Ionian Greek pantheon necessitated special attributes to distinguish her from other deities, a demand that birds, bowls or a veil would not effectively fulfil.

⁵⁰ About lions in general, it should be noticed that lions are a frequent symbol in Asia Minor, perhaps as a result of Persian influence.

Cult Places and Rituals

Rock-cut Monuments

The finds of statuettes in ordinary buildings suggest that Matar was often worshipped in private houses, and no actual building found in Phrygia has yet been identified as a temple.⁵¹ Nevertheless, it is quite certain that the great monumental façades carved in the mountains have been used as places of worship. Sources on Hittite religion reveal a preference for worship on high places, in mountains, etc., which may have influenced the Matar worship. The Phrygian cult monuments (7th century BC), perhaps better known as rock-cut shrines, are situated in the mountainous landscape and consist of a large façade carved into the natural rock and shaped like a house with a niche in which the statue of the goddess was probably located.⁵² This niche represents a doorway (with the doors open, still visible in one of the major monuments, Arslan Kaya) and the surrounding decorations (i.e., the façade monuments) represent the rest of the house with lintel, pediment, gable and *acroterion*. We find Uartian (900–700 BC) similarities in the tradition of cutting into rocks “fake doors” with steps as a location of divine epiphany.⁵³ The tradition of placing a statue of the divinity is, however, a purely Phrygian feature (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:255). There has been some discussion as to whether this “house” mirrors a temple or a house (Roller 1999:112), but it is perhaps only a question of linguistic interest since a temple is basically the house of a god.

Shafts

The great rock-cut monuments were originally believed to be funerary installations,⁵⁴ but even though they resemble the tomb graves of

⁵¹ See my discussion of this below. Note the fact that we have plenty of evidence from the Hittites and Uartians that they built temples for their gods, besides worshipping them in mountainous shrines; see Berndt-Ersöz 2003:179.

⁵² Many niches are empty, but some still contain statues of Matar or statue bases. I will return to these cult façades below in the discussion of the connections between Thrace and Phrygia.

⁵³ Roller 1999:41–62 presents a detailed analysis of the influence of these earlier cultures.

⁵⁴ Berndt-Ersöz 1998:92 and Naumann 1983:53.

Phrygia, the tombs face west while these face south or east, and the assumption was primarily based on the existence of the *shafts*. These are rectangular pits descending from a flat area above the niches and going vertically down behind these, ending on the same level as the niches. They are always connected to the niche by means of a round hole, and ledges on their sides show that lids were attached to them. They, too, have been the subject of much debate. Originally, they were interpreted as tombs (Naumann 1983:52–53). There are, however, good arguments against this. First, they do not resemble any other tombs that we know of in Phrygia, and second, their design makes their function as sepulchral chambers unlikely.⁵⁵ Roller believes that they functioned as deposits for offerings (Roller 1999:98), as does Naumann (1983:53). Another possible function is that they were used as hiding places for oracles or mediums of the goddess (Berndt-Ersöz 1998:98). The close connection between these cult monuments and the presence of water, often a spring, has often been emphasised.⁵⁶ Berndt-Ersöz has shown, though, that this is only true of the type of cultic monuments that have a shaft. Hence, water might suggest some kind of ritual connected with these shafts, and not with the monuments as such. An explanation for this can perhaps be found in Hittite religion, where sacred springs, “holy water,” was very important in connection with divination (Berndt-Ersöz 1998:184).

Stelae

It is very likely that the small *stelae* with reliefs found of Matar, set up outdoors in areas not enriched by suitable mountains, are simplified imitations of these grand cult façades, the “niche” and doorway still being indicated. Vikela (2001:72) argues that these *stelae* were viewed as separate cultic shrines and not just as votives or interior decorations — in other words, they functioned as portable sanctuaries with the power of sanctifying the space around them. This is an interesting point of view since it could explain the lack of monumental temples,

⁵⁵ Their dimensions, the connecting passage between the niches in front of them, and the lids (designed to be re-opened and re-closed) halfway down the shafts. For a full discussion of this, see Berndt-Ersöz 1998.

⁵⁶ E.g., Roller 1999:43, 138, and Vassileva 2001:55.

and it fits very well with the general observations that signs of worship are scattered in many private houses. This might also have survived in the Greek *naiskoi* and in the habit of hanging pictures of Kybele around the neck.⁵⁷

Step Monuments

The aniconic idols, briefly mentioned above, seem to be related to cultic actions since many of them were found in connection with another kind of monuments, called *altars* or *step monuments* in the literature, also to be regarded as early, primitive cult monuments. At a few of these step monuments, signs of animals are still visible. In one case (the step monument at Karahisar), these may be reclining lions. At another (Köhnüs valley), the remains have been interpreted by some as lions, but are more likely to be predatory birds (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:70). As can be deduced from their name, these monuments all have steps (which are also a persistent feature of the rock-cut shrines) and a semi-circular disc on top, as a kind of back-rest. No conclusive facts have yet been agreed upon concerning these. Ramsay called them altars, as does Roller (1999:79). Körte and Akurgal claimed that they were empty thrones of the goddess.⁵⁸ Berndt-Ersöz concludes that they were thrones (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:242). She argues that the semi-circular discs on some of the step monuments symbolise divine presence, i.e., Matar alone in the semi-circular disc or in the single idols found elsewhere, or Matar and her *paredros* in the double idols found on the thrones. This would be an expression of early religiosity, before the image of Matar became anthropomorphic (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:198). Indeed, the aniconic idols definitely antedate the anthropomorphic representations, some of them dating back to the 9th century BC, perhaps even further (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:167). In my view, the arguments about the interpretation of the double or multiple idols as representing different deities are in themselves not very persuasive, but in combination with the theory of the male superior god *Ata*, I find it quite likely that the double idols represent two divinities.

⁵⁷ Vikel 2001: 72ff Cf. Herodotus IV, 76.

⁵⁸ Körte 1898:118–19; Ramsay 1889:167; Roller 1999:79; Akurgal 1955:97–98.

It is generally indicative that the cult locations are most often found in boundary zones, such as the area between city and wild territory and by crossroads, and more importantly by the city gates, where several images of Matar have been found overlooking the entrance, obviously having a protective role (Berndt-Ersöz 2003:185). This role is also visible in the Roman cult and art where she is commonly depicted with a mural crown, cf. the section on Greece and Rome above.

Worship and Rituals

Only little is known of the kind of worship attached to Matar in Phrygia. An early model shrine (early 6th century BC) from Sardis, portraying the rituals connected with the *Lydian* Kybele,⁵⁹ who was, at that time, a blend of the Graeco-Phrygian Kybele and the Neo-Hittite Kubaba, may furnish the best example for comparison of Matar's rituals in Phrygia. Whether these rituals (including music, wine drinking, a mountain procession and, probably, dancing), performed by what seem to be different kinds of female and male priests, also represent cultic activities in Phrygia, is still an open question. What the Phrygian music-playing attendants of the Boğazköy statue testify is that music most likely did play a role in her worship. Unlike the descriptions of the music in Greece as “loud” and “resounding” (Diogenes, Athenaios 1.2; Roller 1999:151) — no doubt caused by the use of castanets and tympana, which were not part of Matar's cult or iconography in Phrygia — the music in Phrygia was probably conceived differently due to the use of other instruments, the flutes, as in the older, Anatolian tradition.⁶⁰ The Boğazköy attendants are presented in a manner that suggests dancing, but aside from these, the evidence of dance in the cult is from the Graeco-Roman age. Vassileva suggests, though, that the mere nature of the façade monuments implies rituals of music and dance (Vassileva 2001:55), which is possible, but hard to prove.

⁵⁹ See Rein 1993 for a full analysis of this votive temple. The mere fact that it is an actual temple for the goddess seems to me a reason for caution in using it as a parallel of worship, since we have no evidence of temples in Phrygia, as mentioned above.

⁶⁰ The music of flutes is referred to as ἡδυβόαι, sweet sounding in Eur. Bacchae, 127, Roller 1999:110, 151; Sfameni Gasparro 1985:4.

A Mystery Religion?

The issue that naturally arises in connection with worship is the question of mysteries. As mentioned, most previous research on Matar concentrates on the Greek mysteries, but even when the Phrygian background is mentioned, her cult is still referred to as mysteries.⁶¹ I am not familiar with one generally recognised definition of mystery religions as such, but having consulted some of the most important works on this theme, my suggestion is that there was no such version of the Matar cult in Phrygia or, at least, that the evidence at this point is so meagre that it would be too hypothetical to engage in. Some of the widely accepted factors that are part of a mystery religion are, in the words of Burkert: "...initiation rituals of a voluntary, personal, and secret character that aimed at a change of mind through experience of the sacred" (Burkert 1987:11). Furthermore, they are attached to certain types of deities, namely chthonic (according to Martin) and/or fertility gods (according to Meyer).⁶² According to the guidelines of Sfameni Gasparro,⁶³ mystery religions also include certain kinds of rituals with a specific purpose, such as illumination, salvation or transformation; an ultimate purpose is also to overcome the vicissitudes of blind *Fortuna* (Martin 1987:59). More specifically, it includes a promise of a happy afterlife (Sourvinou-Inwood 2003:26). According to Martin, the mystery cults concentrate on a myth of a wandering deity, something which is obviously not attested in Phrygia. Bianchi offers a differentiation, based on Plutarch, between "mystery gods" and other gods by characterising the former as "subject to mutability" (Bianchi 1976:2). This fits very well with the later Hellenistic myths about Kybele, but is — again — not attested in Phrygia. Clinton (2003:55) defines a mystery cult by saying, among other things, that the initiands have "to undergo a death-like experience or at least an experience of suffering."

There are a few signs from the Classical period in mainland Greece that her cult had, some way or another, developed in this direction; in Euripides, the rites of Kybele are referred to as *teletai* (*Bacchae* 73), a term that often, though not always (Clinton 2003:53–54) refers to

⁶¹ E.g., Sfameni Gasparro 1985; Fol 1998; Vassileva 2001.

⁶² Martin 1987:58 and Meyer 1987:5.

⁶³ Gasparro 1985:xv, 9, 26 etc.

mystery cults or initiations. If we accept the presence of torch-bearing attendants,⁶⁴ e.g., of Hekate, and the occasional references to nightly rituals (Pindar, *Pyth.* Ode 3.79, cf. also Herod. IV, 76) as evidence of mystery cult, then we may safely conclude that this was part of her worship already with Pindar. A krater from Ferrara from 440 BC (Roller 1999, fig. 43) shows a woman carrying a basket covered with a cloth, on her head. This has been interpreted as a *cista mystica*, a basket with a lid holding the secret objects of the rituals, which would then refer to mystery rites. This basket, however, is also seen on reliefs of non-mystery gods such as Asclepius, and probably just represents a basket with offerings.

Based on the design of the Phrygian cult façades, Vassileva proposes the theory that they may have been used in the context of a mystery cult. To begin with, she sees in the shafts appropriate places for symbolic burial and a place for a *hieros gamos* between king and Matar (Vassileva 2001:61). In my opinion, this theory rests on the old assumption that the shafts were tombs, a suggestion now generally abandoned due to circumstances mentioned above. Secondly, Vassileva sees in the niches (representing doorways) a symbolism in the closing and opening of the doors which refers to initiations. Contrary to this, I think that the doors (or “niches”) on the mountain side most likely represent a direct influence from the Hittite preference for worship in high places, and from the Urartian tradition of cutting fake doors high up on the mountain side indicating that the divinity dwelled there in his or her house, i.e., the mountain (Roller 1999:54). Moreover, the building structures of mystery cult places are not normally mountains; Lawall (2003:93) mentions as signs of mystery rituals in sanctuaries the existence of interior or enclosed spaces, i.e., “cut-off spaces, which . . . meant rituals around the altar would be difficult to observe.” This is exactly the opposite of the Phrygian mountain façades.⁶⁵ Having a niche high above the ground on a mountain visible from miles away greatly reduces

⁶⁴ Appearing for the first time in Phrygian representations in the fourth century BC and found on mainland Greece in large numbers, see Roller’s references, 1999:149, n.19.

⁶⁵ We may disregard the existence of shafts in this connection, partly because the dimensions of these are hardly suitable for initiatory purposes, and partly because only a limited number of the façades have shafts.

the possibility of reserving the epiphany of the divinity to the newly initiated, a necessary attribute of mysteries implied in their secret and personal character.

Last but not least, the mere phenomenon of mystery religions in Archaic times seems to be restricted to Greece (so Bianchi 1976:3) or, later in Hellenistic times, to areas, e.g., Asia Minor, where the inhabitants had long relations to and were influenced by the Greeks.⁶⁶ All things considered, I am not persuaded by Vassileva's theories, and I simply believe that the cult of Matar was not a mystery cult in Phrygia — the arguments in favour of a mystery cult being entirely taken from later, Greek material.

From Phrygia to Greece

Between Phrygia and Greek Ionia lies Lydia, where the Greek-inspired Kybele was worshipped. Rein (1993:55ff.) suggests that the Lydians in their representations of Kybele were influenced by the Ionian Greeks,⁶⁷ and agrees with Graf (1984), who has convincingly concluded that the reception of Matar in Greek Ionia took place in the early 7th century BC, independently of Lydia. Rein (1993:25) and Roller (1999:127) suggest that the transfer of the Matar cult from Phrygia to the East Greek cities happened through the Northern colonies of Milet and Phokaia on the shores of the Southern Black Sea coast and Propontis, since a close contact and interdependence traditionally existed between metropolis and colony, and because the Ionian Greeks were not in direct contact with the Phrygians. As evidence for this theory, Rein (1993:41) draws attention to the fact that Miletos presents the largest number of archaeological artifacts of the Matar cult. However, it is the coastal cities in general that present large number of finds (obviously

⁶⁶ The editor of *Greek Mysteries*, Michael Cosmopoulos, claims in his Preface that mysteries were “by no means restricted to Greece” (xii). The large number of different cults treated in this book includes cults from Asia Minor, but they all come from Ionia, the Greek part of Asia Minor. Also, the oriental mystery gods, obviously not from Greece, like Isis and Atargatis, are not mystery gods until they enter the Greek world in late Classical/Hellenistic times.

⁶⁷ Based, among other things, on the fact that the Lydian lions bear witness to Greek influence from the beginning (Rein 1993:66).

due to the fact that the Greeks tended to live there, and that most excavations have, accordingly, taken place there). Ephesos, for instance, presents a larger number of finds than Miletos, but did not have any colonies in the North. Moreover, there are no Archaic, even Classical, finds from the regions of Mysia or Bithynia, according to Schwertheim 1978. This circumstance, however, contradicts the fact that we do know of Phrygian cultural influence stretching this far north. A Daskyleion temple model demonstrates Phrygian influence near the Propontis area from the 8th or 7th century BC.⁶⁸ The late dates of Schwertheim's finds also conflict with the story of Anacharsis in Herodotos (IV, 76) confirming a cult in Kyzikos, at least in his own time, but perhaps already in the 7th century when Anacharsis lived. Furthermore, probably other artifacts from this region found within the past 30 years can throw new light on the Matar cult in the northern part of Anatolia, and the iconography of this Black Sea material can reveal whether the cult was primarily carried out by Phrygians, Greeks or Lydians.

The Lydian Influence on Early Greek Representations

Graf claims that the assimilation of the two goddesses, Lydian Kubaba and Greek Kybele, only happened during the gradual Hellenisation of Lydia after the 4th century BC (Graf 1984:119). In view of the fact that Matar arrived in the Greek East before the intervention of the Lydians, I still believe, however, that the Lydians did have an impact on the development of the Ionian iconography before 400 BC: the earliest finds of the Ionian reliefs of Matar represent two types of images. One type (Miletos, Kyme, Samos etc., ca. 550 BC) is identified as Matar because of the standing position and the architectural frame symbolising a house with a gabled roof (a frame known as a *naiskos*), whose similarity with the Phrygian façades is clearly intended. Many of these sculptures hold a pomegranate as an attribute — typical of early Greek figures (as well as of Kubaba), but very rare in Phrygia. This indicates, in my opinion, an influence from Kubaba, possibly through the Lydians.

The other type (from the mid 6th century BC) represents Matar as enthroned, dressed in a Greek *chiton*, and attended by lions — i.e., the

⁶⁸ I was averted to this by Roller in a private e-mail.

type that was to become standard in Greece. Rein proposes the theory that the rites of the Greek Kybele (including dance, music and wine, performed by a group of youths, the *Kourobantes*) may actually be a result of the Lydian-Phrygian rites as seen on the Sardis temple model (Rein 1993:73–74).

Conclusion

For now, it suffices to conclude that there was a great difference between the Phrygian and the Graeco-Roman cults of Matar, and that recent research has successfully disposed of some of the old myths in the description of Matar in Phrygia. Going back to some of the preliminary remarks of my introduction, new research has proven that Matar was indeed a Phrygian, not an age-old Greek goddess. Moreover, we can actually come quite far in describing her Phrygian traits without the perspective of the Greeks. This analysis shows that a profound difference existed between the Graeco-Roman Kybele and the Phrygian Matar.

The conclusions in this article are primarily drawn from studies on the cult in Phrygia. These may, however, also point forward to the Greek phenomenon of mystery religions. Whereas, according to old theories, mystery religions originate in a divine couple, exhibit strong agricultural or fertility aspects and include a myth of a wandering deity, this article has tried to show that this is not the case for Kybele. Not only was Attis a late development, even later than the mystery traits in the cult, but the archaeological evidence also seems to show a development from a pair of gods, a Mother and a Father, in Phrygia (not including a mystery) to a prominent, even singular female goddess as an object of worship including traits of mystery cult. Moreover, the strong connections with fertility were not evident until Roman times, long after the development into a mystery cult.

Despite the new knowledge on the subject, there are still a number of unanswered questions regarding the cult of Matar, some of which will probably be answered through further excavations in Anatolia. Other issues, however, may be illuminated through an investigation of her cult in the Black Sea area. Generally, the characteristics of the Matar cult in this area is a subject that has been only sporadically discussed in

Western research.⁶⁹ As researchers from the Black Sea Centre in Aarhus have argued (Hinge 2004; Bilde 2006), religion tended to be more shamanistic and eschatological in these areas, which perhaps could account for the early appearance of the tympanon (reflecting a particular kind of rites) on the Pontic North-Western coast. Furthermore, the questions of a common Thracian-Phrygian background, and the problem of determining the transfer of the cult from Phrygia to Greece, can benefit from this research.

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⁶⁹ My PhD project entitled “The Mother of Gods — reception and transformation of an Anatolian deity in the Black Sea area,” will be an attempt to investigate the characteristics of the cult in this area.

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Review Essay

Minimalizing Religion

Reflections on *Holy Terrors*:
Thinking about Religion after September 11

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In *Holy Terrors* (University of Chicago Press 2003), Bruce Lincoln follows in the footsteps of his fellow Chicagoan Jonathan Z. Smith by directly addressing difficult questions involving religion and violence. Smith's justification for his inquiry into the Jonestown Massacre seems equally applicable to the attacks of 9/11: "From one point of view, one might claim that Jonestown was the most important single event in the history of religions, for if we continue, as a profession, to leave it ununderstandable, then we will have surrendered our rights to the academy" (Smith 1982:104). Fortunately, while Smith was unable to find a single academic work in the history of religions dealing with the massacre, today we have access to the rich material that has been contributed to the field in the twenty years since. *Holy Terrors* is a collection of separate essays exploring religion and its relation to violence, the state and culture, in which Lincoln draws upon a wide variety of material on Islamism, American televangelism and religious nationalism from Ireland to India, and offers a number of theories aimed at contextualizing and increasing our ability to come to terms with ever too recurrent "important single events in the history of religions."

The one theme that informs nearly every theory presented in this collection is Lincoln's definition of "minimalist religion" born out of the Enlightenment as a reaction to the destruction and chaos of the Wars

of Religion. According to his analysis, thinkers from Voltaire to Hume, Hobbes to Kant limited the role of religion in the public sphere, most clearly by creating the secular state with institutions filling roles previously occupied by the Church, including education; and by replacing religious discourse with reason as the arbiter of truth.¹ The kind of religion that is left over from this constriction — personal, internal and socially-inert — he terms “minimalist,” as opposed to religions that claim a stronger and more direct role in social and political issues, defined “maximalist.”

Lincoln introduces this classification in Chapter 1 by pointing to what he and others have felt as a limitation, or fundamental bias, in current approaches to religion. He begins with Asad’s critique of Geertz: that too often the personal or “interior” aspect of religion (i.e., faith) is highlighted at the expense of all others and thus we are equipped only to discuss Protestant Christianity as a religion.² To accentuate our inability to come to terms with other religious phenomena Lincoln brings in Sayyid Qutb’s critique of American culture for limiting religion to the confines of the church; essentially decrying what we usually take to be the characteristic feature of religion as irreligious. Lincoln’s choice of Qutb is based not only on his relevance to definitions of religion, but also because the Egyptian thinker is seen as a central figure to the Muslim Brotherhood in particular and Islamic “fundamentalism” in general. Thus for Lincoln Protestant Christianity and radical Islam form two poles of the same axis, being “minimalist” or “maximalist” according to the role proposed for religion in public life.

In order to widen our understanding of religion enough to understand both minimalist and maximalist varieties, Lincoln proposes a new definition of religion that brings our attention to four categories: 1) *Discourse*, the creation and use of a transcendent subject and a transcendent authority; 2) *Practice*, ritual or ethical action that in itself is not inherently religious, but becomes religious in its relation to discourse; 3) *Community*, the creation of communal identity and difference based

¹ This view has been more recently alluded to in the “Introduction” in Juergensmeyer 2005:1.

² The difficulties inherent in the category belief have been further elaborated in Giordano-Zecharya 2005.

on both discourse and ritual; and 4) *Institutions* with leaders responsible for the interpretation and preservation of discourse, practice and community.

The rest of Chapter 1 and the following two chapters apply this new four-part definition of religion to events that otherwise challenge or evade our understanding: the *Instructions* to the hitchhikers of 9/11, the televised speech of televangelist Jerry Falwell shortly after the events (Chapter 3), and the speeches of George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden a month later (Chapter 2). In these case studies Lincoln employs his classic style of analysis, illuminating the symbols, metaphors, narratives and other elements of religious discourse and bringing our attention to the techniques and effects of applying these to contemporary events and public figures. For example, the comparison between George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden traces a strong convergence of perspective between the two leaders: in dividing the world into two opposing camps of good and evil, disqualifying the option of neutrality, and using the image of children as innocent victims in justifying their causes. The one issue where the two leaders use opposing discursive strategies is the role of religion in the conflict, with Bush making a clear effort to include Muslim countries as allies and demonstrating a respect for Islam as a great religion, and bin Laden frequently employing religious language, casting himself and his followers as the true Muslims, the USA as infidels, and “moderate” Muslim leaders as traitors.

Regarding Jerry Falwell, Lincoln makes explicit the parallels between current events and political figures and the period preceding the first exile of Israel as recounted in the books of Kings and Chronicles. According to Falwell’s and others’ interpretations, abortion and gay rights are acts of idolatry, the evangelists the prophets of God, and the events of 9/11 acts of divine retribution. Applied to Falwell, Lincoln’s new analytical structure reveals the following results: 1) *Discourse*: both canonical scripture and preaching as a method to mask the preacher’s interpretations with the authority of scripture; 2) *Practice*: a normative ethics based on sexual morality and the act of preaching itself; 3) *Institution*: the organization and management of the clergy and the church in an entrepreneurial fashion; 4) *Community*: both the nation and the state are presented as bodies with both good and evil elements, with the “church” as the positive element in both.

Chapter 4 outlines a general theory of culture in which religion as one of three components of culture serves as a source of authority in

conflicts over the remaining two, ethics (“what is good”) and aesthetics (“what is pleasing”). Lincoln sees these last two elements as matters of preference. The role of religion is to give added authority to people’s preferences by making them “transcendent,” eliminating direct challenges and forcing criticism to take place on the level of interpretation and heuristics. With this perspective, “maximalist” religion is not simply an attempt of religion to impose itself on other spheres but attempts on the part of the other spheres to gain authority.

Connecting this theory of culture with the view that creating the possibility of a “minimalist” religion was the goal of the Enlightenment endeavor, reducing religion’s role in the public sphere and replacing it with the nation-state had the effect of opening new markets, both in terms of commerce and in tastes. The further effects are the expansion of Euro-American colonialism, the imposition of minimalist religion on cultures without the experience of the Wars of Religion and the alienation of the local population in the process. While cautioning about harmful effects of exporting minimalist religion in contexts without a similar history, Lincoln seems to view the Enlightenment project and minimalist religion as generally positive, warning the reader that “when one rejects the Enlightenment’s values en masse and dispenses with its model of culture, one risks not just a return of the repressed, but novel Wars of Religion” (Lincoln 2003:61).

Chapter 5 is an exploration of the tenuous relation between nation and state, and an attempt to produce a schema of, or at least to distinguish between, four broad categories of nation-state relationships. Lincoln begins by noting that the tensions between nation and state belie a conflict between religion and secularity. The state is a fundamentally secular institution, being the embodiment of the move to limit religion’s political (and destructive) role in the Wars of Religion. It is a “governmental apparatus that manages the political affairs of the nation(s) for which it takes responsibility and over which it exercises power.” These, on the other hand, are characterized by a “population that constructs and sustains a unitary collective identity” (Lincoln 2003:62), and were developed in the 18th and 19th centuries with “attempts to expand capacities for organized violence by peoples who felt themselves menaced by more powerful neighboring states” (Lincoln 2003:63). National identity is typically based on religion, and in cases where this is not the case, the nation still takes on a “quasi-religious

aura” (Lincoln 2003:63). The underlying conflict between the two is intensified by the religious commitment of the adversaries, who “define themselves and their cause as not just moral, but holy” (Lincoln 2003:74).

Framed thus, Lincoln’s four-part schema for nation-state relationships can be described as follows. One, in a religiously homogenous state the state’s minimalist character can be seen as antithetical or opposed to the nation’s religion, and we find religious attempts to control the state institutions. Two other models describe a state containing multiple nations, the difference being the degree to which the state is associated with the dominant nation and religion (from benevolently even-handed to clearly preferential to the dominant nation). In these scenarios, like the previous, religion serves as both a political critique and as an alternative model. Fourth, Lincoln describes the post-modern phenomenon of the “deconstruction” of a state into smaller, more religiously homogenous states. In summing up the role of religion in national conflict, Lincoln notes that “all religions sanction . . . violence under certain circumstances” (2003:73), and that religion is used to raise the stakes in general conflicts over scarce resources by coding conflict as “not just moral, but holy” (2003:74). This tendency towards conflict is matched by the secular state’s effectiveness in reducing violence, at least until the late 1970s.

Finally, in chapter 6 Lincoln presents the reader with a dilemma in the study of religion, one closely connected with the relation between religion and violence. In his eyes, the two main schools of religious studies — “romantic” and “materialist” — are unprepared to address rebellious or revolutionary religious activity such as cargo cults and millenarian movements. This is because the romantic school’s focus on religion as giving meaning to suffering, and the materialist focus on the elite’s use of religion to perpetuate their interests, are qualified only to explain how social members submit and lose out in the struggles inherent in society as a “field of tension” (Marx, Gluckman) and conflict over power and prestige.

Attempting to construct a framework capable of describing both sides of the power conflict, and both reactions to political weakness (submission and rebellion), Lincoln puts forward three categories of religion vis-à-vis political power: “religions of the status quo,” “religions of resistance” and “religions of revolution.” A religion of the status quo

is a tool of those who control wealth, prestige and the legitimate use of force, in propagating their right through power and achieving “ideological hegemony throughout the state or empire” (Lincoln 2003:82). This goal is achieved through education and through material support for individuals and institutions responsible for propagating ideology (clergy).

In contrast, a religion of resistance arises at the points of society where the religion of the status quo fails to achieve its desired hegemony. Individuals attempt to defy the established religion not through direct confrontation but merely through survival, which for Lincoln is itself a form of defiance. Under certain conditions a religion of resistance transforms into a religion of revolution. This third category of religion is characterized not by resistance to the dominant ideology, but by defiance of the dominant class itself. Three “triggers” are identified in this transformation: a worsening in material conditions that make alternative social models more convincing, the development of a new theory of political legitimacy that challenges the established right to power, and success on the part of the religion of resistance in numerical growth. The resulting revolt against the dominant class takes on not only a physical dimension but also a symbolic one, in the sense that physical violence, assassinations, massacres etc. are ritually constructed as a breaking of taboos.

The subtitle of *Holy Terrors* — “Thinking about religion” — makes clear that this work intends to focus on questions of theory and method when addressing religious topics, and not on producing analyses of historical depth on any particular case study. In the few case-studies or applications provided, however, this limitation might well have been made more explicit. What are the implications of setting up George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden as parallel opposites in a single schema? How informative is a description of their rhetorical and symbolic choices without further knowledge of (especially in the case of bin Laden) their public, their power base, their respective roles and the nature of their organizations? Lincoln sees religious elements of Bush’s speech as both proof of the (perceived) religious nature of the conflict and as rhetorical bones thrown to his religious constituency “likely to go unheard by those without the requisite textual knowledge” (2003:30). Such an interpretation is as valid as any, although citing the scriptural

sources behind religious metaphors, for example, raises a number of questions including the level of scriptural competence of both religious and secular Americans and the correlation of that knowledge to political and religious identity. The point could in fact be taken further, in questioning to what extent a metaphor can rightly be claimed as religious, given that language and meaning more often than not transcend institutional and cultural borders. While an in-depth analysis was not the aim of this work, it is worth mentioning that without further historical data even the most sophisticated theory or definition is likely to lead to further opacity or projection.

As a whole, in bringing our attention to aspects of religion usually overlooked, *Holy Terrors* puts us in a better position to understand some forms of religious activity that we find so problematic. Kippenberg (2005) has since observed the attempts by the White House to resolve this difficulty by portraying the hijackers' deeds as politically, not religiously, motivated, and like Lincoln points to the *Instructions* as proof of the contrary. The four-part definition of religion introduced at the beginning of the book, applied almost line by line to the *Instructions*, intentionally avoids questions of the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of the document by concentrating not on *doxa* but neither specifically on *praxis*, both being further elaborated by the construction of community and institution.

In this endeavor Lincoln has taken the approach of religious studies as a social *science*, in the sense that he offers not only analysis, but frameworks that can be empirically validated and that offer the possibility of prediction, even if risking specific predictions is beyond his scope. His theory of religion as a "site of contention" between nation and state over the character of political institutions, mapping the possible outcomes of the nation/state conflict according to the population's religious heterogeneity and the state's role vis-à-vis its religious nations, could be applied to any number of contemporary situations. In-depth applications of this theory to the Muslim minorities in Thailand and Israel, both examples of the third conflict identified in Lincoln's theory, might yield interesting results, both individually and in the comparative sense.

I would suggest that predicting the conditions under which religions of revolution are formed is no less courageous, even if it is unclear whether Lincoln's tripartite framework illustrates simply the develop-

ment of resistance and revolution in religious contexts or the deployment of violence, and what the difference, or relation, between the two might be. In any case, Lincoln hails this approach as an effort to go beyond the inability of both the romantic and materialist approaches to understanding religions that do other than support the status quo. However, pivotal to Lincoln's theory is the unstated assertion of a class struggle in material and political terms and its fundamental importance in driving social events — itself a principle of the materialist approach. Thus Lincoln's concept of religions of resistance and revolution, with its focus on economic power and the use of religion as ideology in furthering a political goal, seems more to be continuing the materialist school than surpassing it. This view does not necessarily limit or discredit the usefulness of Lincoln's new taxonomy — on the contrary, it seems likely to provide inspiration for schools of non-materialist approaches ("romantic" included) to extend and challenge their premises and assertions by applying them to situations of resistance and revolution, even (and especially) if the element of struggle is given less primacy.

The remaining theory — religion as one of three components of culture — serves well to flesh out the theory of minimalist religion. By tracing the changes in the equilibrium between religion, ethics and aesthetics during and after the Enlightenment, Lincoln contextualizes the limiting of religious institutions, practice, discourse and community to marginal aspects of society and describes the limiting of the discourse of truth and its replacement by reason as a unique historical configuration.

However, the thesis of religion as a symbolic instrument in a universal struggle over aesthetics and ethics gives the impression that ethical and aesthetic preferences are unrelated to those elements of culture we see as religious. Unfortunately the reader is given little information on what these preferences might otherwise be based. Discovering the nature of human preferences is far from straightforward, but those same symbols and structures that are used in imposing one's "preferred" behaviors are just as important in the process of apprehending and interpreting (and thus feeling preference for) such behaviors. Using Lincoln's example of sexual mores, it is clear that religious discourse has been utilized in imposing particular social behaviors, but it is just as clear that these behaviors (and their disruptive counterparts) are not felt somehow "objectively" but through and in terms of religious discourse.

Lincoln's axiom that religion is a tool to raise stakes in conflicts of power (whether focused on ethical preference or the nature of governing institutions) sheds light on a number of phenomena, as he has shown in his previous analyses of the Spanish civil war and the Iranian revolution (Lincoln 1989: 103–127, 32–37). Still, it would seem that religion is only *effective* as such a tool because it directly influences those preferences and individuals' willingness to accept them.

While drawing our attention to varying degrees of religious involvement in public life is clearly needed, it would appear that using the minimalist-maximalist divide or spectrum as our main lens risks reinforcing another perspective: that a secularized Western culture with a limited role for religion in public life and a religious Islamic culture desiring to see all aspects of society imbued with religion are two "fundamental" opposites.³ This may not be Huntington's clash of civilizations, but a model of irresolvable conflict is evident, and is mirrored in the minimalist secular and the maximalist religious elements Lincoln describes within American society. Using Foucault's analysis of the repression of childhood sexuality as a model, could we not view the minimalist Enlightenment-inspired separation of religion and public life not as repression but as an intensification, multiplication and saturation of the public sphere with religion? Legal procedures and formulas, public institutions with their organization, physical structures and architecture, definitions of religion and religious, all permeate this singular, "minimalist" culture and require unceasing effort on the part of an increasing number of social actors. Through the process of separating religion from public life, society does not seem to have been purged of religion but rather inundated with it.⁴

Similarly, if reason has become the means by which aesthetic and ethical preferences are expressed and determined, would it not follow

³ The type of liberal Islam put forward by Madjid, however, fits the minimalist type more accurately in calling for the separation of religion and the state, or "secularization." Even as the scholar sees "secularism" as an ideology that functions as a religion, the premise questioned by Asad is clearly present: "The state is one of the aspects of worldly life whose dimension is rational and collective, while religion is an aspect of another kind of life whose dimension is spiritual and personal" (Madjid 1998:294).

⁴ See, for example, Smith 2004, who remarks that "The Internal Revenue Service is, both de facto and de jure, America's primary definer and classifier of religion" (376).

that Enlightenment reason is a religion according to Lincoln's three-part schema? The subject of the reasonability of reason or its objectivity is by no means undiscussed.⁵ I would only point out that if reason in this sense fulfills religion's cultural role, the idea of "minimalist" religion seems less convincing. The values, symbols, discourse, communities and institutions of "reason" or secularity are as active and as engaged as any "religious" equivalent.⁶

How might we account for the fact that the minimalist-maximalist division is more a peculiarity of our own culture? Abandoning the dualist theory, could we not explore the diffusion of the discourse, practice, community and institution of "Enlightenment culture" in light of Lincoln's four-part definition? Could not the vast cultural enterprise that created and diffused the practice, discourse, community and institutions of non-religion be considered "religious" in this same sense?

Whether we follow Lincoln's lead in seeing the development of a minimalist religion leaving a free market of preferences, or the development of a religion whose discourse is based on the idea of reason or secularity, the claim that Enlightenment values were successful in reducing warfare and violence seems to this reader dubious. The nation-state and its monopoly on violence, the appeal to reason in justifying one's ethical preferences and the confining of religion to a spiritual or individual sphere were all involved, in one way or another, in the project of colonialism, two world wars, the development (and use!) of nuclear weapons and countless instances of ethnic cleansing. The founders of the secular state may have been reacting to the Wars of Religion,⁷ but just as Lincoln reminds us that "no movement or ideology is frozen into a single sociopolitical stance for eternity" (Lincoln 2003:91), so we

⁵ Durkheim's *Cult of Reason* proposed in Durkheim 1912 is a case in point for approaching reason and the limiting of religion with an eye for each area of Lincoln's definition of religion. See Bellah's work on Civil Religion, for example Bellah 1980.

⁶ This view has been taken up by Gentile 2006, who notes that "modern nationalism is a secular religion, born from the sacralization of the fatherland, and in whose name the events, places and heroes that constitute its 'sacred history' are consecrated" (166, my translation).

⁷ Foucault has offered a radically different interpretation of Hobbes' "war of all against all." See Foucault 2003:87–111.

must avoid viewing “Enlightenment values” only through the eyes of those who engendered (or appropriated) them.⁸

Returning to the minimalist-maximalist divide, Lincoln’s four-part definition of religion actually aids us in collapsing the imagined abyss between our singular “minimalist” Enlightenment culture and the rest of humanity. Could the fact that an analysis based on this definition can be equally applied to conflicts where religion plays a less-marked role or none at all hint that what we see as a limitation of religion is actually a transition from one religion’s discourse to another’s? How else can we make sense of Lincoln’s observation that, even in the absence of religion, the nation takes on a “quasi-religious aura”? How might Lincoln’s schemas be applied to challenges to the state by contemporary secular secessionist movements (Catalonia, Basque, Padania) and non-religious ideological movements of the previous two centuries (Fascism, Communism and Anarchism)?⁹ At this point we draw close to Latour’s conclusion that “[w]e are not exotic but ordinary. As a result, the others are not exotic either. They are like us, they have never stopped being our brethren. Let us not add to the crime of believing that we are radically different to all the others” (Latour 1993:127).

We seem to have returned to the question of what is religious about religion — if questions of absolute truth, sacred histories, community and institutions are found in contexts not generally recognized as religious, we are forced either to broaden the scope of what we consider religion (enough to consider every possible social phenomenon that involves discourse to authorize human behavior) or to consider these phenomena as independent of religion. Alongside the ever-growing bibliography on religion, religious nationalism, fundamentalism and violence, in the same period we have also seen the development of theories based on those particular processes included in Lincoln’s definition: discourse and authority (Lincoln 1994), ritual and authority (Bell (1992, 1997), community and identity. Any and all of these approaches could be applied to “Enlightenment religion” or the project of “minimalizing religion” were we to suspend our presumption of difference.

⁸ It may be further pointed out that the Enlightenment is far from the unitary philosophy that Lincoln seems to suggest.

⁹ Gentile (1996) has observed the role of discourse, ritual and myth in the development of Italian Fascism, dubbing this process “the sacralization of politics.”

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Book Reviews

Wörterbuch der Religionen. Edited by CHRISTOPH AUFFARTH, HANS G. KIPPENBERG AND AXEL MICHAELS. Stuttgart, Kröner 2006. Pp XVIII + 589. ISBN 3-520-14001-2. € 49.80.

One could write a history of the study of religion during the last century by examining the changing approaches, entries and vocabulary found in the dictionaries, handbooks and encyclopedias published since the first edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (1909–1913) and the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (1908–1926). Illuminating as it would be, such a task would test the endurance of even the most resolute archivist. We are fortunate, therefore, that the publication of an entirely new edition of the Kröner *Wörterbuch der Religionen* allows us to see the extent to which German-language scholarship has changed its approach to this most contentious of subjects. A comparison with the 1985 edition, “neu bearbeitet, ergänzt und herausgegeben von Kurt Goldammer unter Mitwirkung von Johannes Laube und Udo Tworuschka,” which constituted the third revision of the 1952 *Wörterbuch der Religionen*, edited by Alfred Bertholet in association with Hans von Campenhausen, shows, first of all, a significant decrease of the space devoted to Christianity and Biblical matters, with the concomitant increase of entries devoted to religions other than Christianity. Thus, already on the first page of the new work one finds an entry on Abhinavagupta, the great Kashmiri philosopher, not mentioned in 1985. About a hundred pages later one finds a cluster of nine entries beginning with Dh-, all of them related to Indian and Buddhist religion, whereas in the 1985 ed. there were only two such Dh- entries. Similarly, without neglecting Western developments or theoretical issues, A. Wilke’s insightful entry on “*Mystik*” pays attention to Indian materials. Topics that twenty years ago had not been considered relevant, or that may have appeared as too polemical, make their appearance now; among them, mention must be made of “*Abtreibung*,” “*Aggression*,” “*Alltag/Alltagsreligion*,” “*Gewalt/Gewaltlos*.” Other entries reveal shifting theoretical concerns, all of which enrich our understanding of religion. Examples of this are H. Schulz’s “*Religionsökonomie*,” H. Mohr’s “*Wahrnehmung*” and “*Religionsästhetik*,” as well as A. Koch’s “*Körper*,” which moves far beyond the “*Leib und Seele*” problematic

of the 1985 work. A. Michaels' "Gabe" is an example of the editors' emphasis on the transactional/processual character of religion, so different from the concern with "essences" found in early twentieth-century scholarship. While in the 1985 *Wörterbuch* "Erlebnis" is described, following Schleiermacher, as "das eigentlich schöpferische in der religiösen Entwicklung," S. Murken's "Gefühle" refers to ethology, while in his entry on "Erfahrung" — and in A. Grieser's "Gefühl" — the concerns of the phenomenology of religion are placed in their historical context. This work is in fact characterized by the authors' reflexivity concerning the vocabulary of/about religion. This can be seen in Michael's "Ritual" and especially in C. Auffarth's "Religion," an entry in which, instead of being concerned with the "Wesen" of religion (as was the 1985 ed.), the European role in the constitution of this concept is examined; see also "Europäische Religionsgeschichte." Another characteristic of this *Wörterbuch*, based on the premise that *Religionswissenschaft* is *Kulturwissenschaft*, is the concern with the social functions of phenomena such as myth. Thus J. Mohn emphasizes the role of myth in the "Eingliederung von Individuen in kollektive Sozialverbände," paying attention to the interplay between "Inklusion" and "Abgrenzung." Although considerably shorter than the multi-volume *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe* (1988–2001) and the *Metzler Lexikon Religion* (1999–2002), this one-volume dictionary accomplishes what its editors set out to accomplish: a factually reliable and, above all, theoretically lucid presentation of the shifting cluster of phenomena generally classified under the no less shifting label of "religion." One can expect that just as the Bertholet *Wörterbuch der Religionen* went through a series of reincarnations for more than thirty years, this 2006 work, suitably updated and revised, will be consulted for the next several decades.

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Le Talmud et les origines juives du christianisme : Jésus, Paul et les judéo-chrétiens dans la littérature talmudique. By DAN JAFFÉ. Paris, Éditions du Cerf 2007. Pp. 227. ISBN 978-2-204-08264-8.

This small volume, following in the wake of (and in part popularizing) the author's full-scale and detailed *Le judaïsme et l'avènement du christianisme: Orthodoxie et hétérodoxie dans la littérature talmudique, I^{er}–II^{er} siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2005), is quite unpretentious. Although its opening sentence defines it as an “étude historique,” when the next sentence gets specific all it says is “il a pour objectif de comprendre et d'analyser différents textes de la littérature talmudique.” Indeed, most of its chapters are each devoted to the analysis and explanation of a single Talmudic text, making it something like an anthology.

However, the present volume does make an historical claim, insofar as it focuses, in its analyses, upon the attitude each text bespeaks vis à vis (Jewish) Christianity and, especially, the degree to which it reflects “rupture” between Jewish Christians and rabbinic Jews. This special interest governs the order of the first three chapters, as is shown by their sub-titles: “Les prémices de la rupture,” “La rupture annoncée,” and “La rupture consommée.” Jaffé claims that the three rabbinic texts studied in these chapters (Bab. Tal. *Avodah Zarah* 16b–17a, Tosephta, *Hullin* 2.22–23; and Tosephta, *Shabbat* 13.5) reflect the growth, over time, of the break between Judaism and Christianity. Namely, if the first text shows that prior to the destruction of the Second Temple (70 c.e.) a youngish rabbi had no problem about discussing issues of Jewish law with a disciple of Jesus, but that as an old man (i.e., in the second century) he regretted it, the other two texts, correspondingly, show second-century reservations about social intercourse between Jews and Jewish Christians and then — downright antipathy. The other chapters flesh out that final stage of development with studies of other texts or, more broadly, other topics — the liturgical cursing of *minim* (“heretics,” which at least includes Jewish Christians) and reactions to Pauline ideas. The volume is rounded out by an opening chapter on rabbinic literature, the status of the rabbis and their concerns to achieve stability in the wake of the destruction, on the one hand, and by a closing survey of some modern Jewish views on Jesus, on the other.

The book is clearly meant for readers who are not familiar with Talmudic texts and have little knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic. Accordingly, it is understandable that Jaffé doesn't get into any textual issues. Perhaps, however, he should at least have pointed them out; these issues are interesting, for the sensitive texts he discusses have often been the victims of tampering and censorship, and at times these issues are also crucial. Thus, for example, Jaffé takes

it for granted that the first of the abovementioned texts twice refers to “Jesus of Nazareth,” although the standard edition of this Talmudic text does not mention him at all. Readers who somehow learn of this and are interested in assessing the evidence for the widespread — and well-founded (on the basis of manuscripts and parallels) — assumption, here shared tacitly by Jaffé, that the original and uncensored text twice refers to *Yeshu haNotzri*, will have to look elsewhere. Or, for another example, Jaffé translates the third abovementioned text as if it refers to “les livres des minim qui entraînent l’inimité, *la jalousie et les dissensions* entre le peuple juif et son Père qui est aux cieux” (84), following Zuckermendel’s edition of the Tosephta (129), but doesn’t note that the italicized words are not found in Lieberman’s later and more elaborate edition (58), although they do appear in parallel texts. These issues can be important, for if in the former case we naturally assume that the references to Jesus are original and later versions omitted them, in the latter it may well be that an original reference to mere “inimité” grew in time into the longer list; the question of when that growth transpired (if it did) has everything to do with Jaffé’s focus upon the development of “rupture” between the two religions.

Apart from textual issues, we would also note that it is somewhat hazardous to build a theory about progressive estrangement on the basis of a single text (the first one) that shows commonality at the point of departure. And that is all the more so insofar as Jaffé’s interpretation of the text does not address two points: the story has Jesus’ disciple, in speaking to a rabbi, refer to the Torah as “*your* [plural] Torah,” and the legal issue he raises for discussion — is it, despite Deuteronomy 23:18, permissible to use a prostitute’s wages to build a latrine for the high priest? — seems to be a parody. It seems, that is, that the rabbis who told this story were hostile to Christianity and wanted their Jewish audience to understand that even when Jewish Christians talk about Torah, they do so as outsiders and focus, puerilely (or worse), upon erotica and scatology.

This is not to say that Jaffé’s historical thesis is not likely. Indeed, it is likely that the rupture between rabbis and Jewish Christians grew over time, hand in hand with the recognition on both sides that the differences between them amounted to a break between two different religions and hand in hand with the growing prominence of *Gentile* Christianity — which clarified all the more that those who opted for Christianity were opting for something non-Jewish. And it is also likely that analysis of rabbinic literature will produce new evidence for this thesis. What it does mean is that a slim volume focusing only upon a few Talmudic passages should not be expected to establish the thesis, for there is much more Talmudic material to consider, just as there is much relevant Christian and pagan material. But a volume such as this is a handy

way of introducing scholars and other interested readers to one relevant corpus, and if, as Jaffé puts it in his foreword, the book also suggests some appropriate and new “pistes de recherches dans le vaste domaine . . . qu’est l’étude du judéo-christianisme ancien,” we should be grateful to him.

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Tantric Revisionings: New Understandings of Tibetan Buddhism and Indian Religion. By GEOFFREY SAMUEL. Aldershot, Hampshire, UK, Ashgate Publishing 2005. Pp. 384. ISBN 0-7546-5280-7. £ 60.

Geoffrey Samuel's *Tantric Revisionings* is a series of essays, approximately two-thirds of which have been published elsewhere. The book is divided into four parts. Part I provides an introduction and an essay on "Tibet as a Stateless Society;" Part II, Historical, is the longest, with six essays on tantra as *shamanism* in India and Tibet, Bon, Buddhism and State in eighth century Tibet, Indus Valley civilization and the origin of the Gesar Epic; Part III, Religion in Contemporary Asia, addresses the relationship between Tibet and Southeast Asia, Vajrayāna and Himalayan folk religion, goddesses and ritual theory in various forms; Part IV, Buddhism and Other Western Religions, is entirely new, with papers on the spread of Tibetan Buddhism and the reasons for the attractiveness of tantra in the modern period. Despite Ashgate's reputation for fine production values, this book is a standard Indian printing that is priced beyond the means of most scholars; virtually the same book is sold by Motilal Banarsidass in India for Rs. 495 (about £ 5.80), and it is hard to imagine a justification for the difference of price for the same product.

What is not clear from the above summary is that all of the introductory chapter and much of the volume is devoted to resurrecting and defending Samuel's thesis proposed in his 1993 book *Civilized Shamans: Buddhism in Tibetan Societies*, Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press. The many reviews of that book questioned the appropriateness of applying "*shaman*" as a category term to tantric Buddhism, and here Samuel replies by emphasizing that his use of the term is not a historical but an analytical category. Thus, he does not propose that the term be used as an affirmation of the descent of tantric Buddhism from Siberian *shamanism*, but as a cross-cultural description. He accordingly places his employment of *shamanism* terminology within the domain of anthropological ethnology, affirming that *shaman* is a viable etic designation for a variety of behaviors and expressions exhibited through times and across cultures. Indeed, the emphasis in Samuel's work is on variety, for he maintains that "A key concept for my work is that the 'shaman' is a shapeshifter, in the sense of someone who moves between different roles of *personae* . . . Through manipulating these [symbolic] entities in ritual, they maintain or transform the social relations, the self-concepts, the emotional life of the social group . . ." (11–12) Elsewhere, Samuel emphasizes the creativity of shamanism, that "shamanism be defined in terms of this central process of modification and transformation of culture." (78)

Defining this category to include both the interaction with symbolic entities, such as spirits, and the process of moving between social roles in reality gives

Samuel very wide latitude to define what constitutes a *shaman*. He is thus motivated throughout these essays to include a very diverse group of social agents: spirit mediums, bards, *siddhas*, tantric meditators, Tibetan treasure finders, orthodox Buddhist monks inspired in visions or dreams, those (predominantly women) who fall unconscious and have visions of hell, healers, diviners, and a host of related actors in the South and Central Asian environment. All of these, Samuel argues, meet the criteria of a *shaman*.

Samuel's attempt to find an appropriate nomothetic category for such religious expressions is certainly intriguing, but it would appear that the designation *shaman* remains problematic in this regard. For one thing, the category drawn by Samuel appears to be too broad, for it seems to include too many different religious actors, and (given the permeation of religion in some societies) it would be applicable to others as well. Political, commercial and craft leaders in India, for example, often demonstrate a variety of social roles and interaction with "symbolic entities." He attempts to articulate a delimiting and contrasting category of "clerical" religion, but in fact many real clerics (such as the conservative reformer Tsongkhapa) have been specified by Samuel as *shamans*, either because of their involvement with tantric practices or because of their visionary experience. Conversely, Samuel's *shaman* category may seem out of register in some way, for it is not clear that actual Siberian (Evenk, Mongol, Gilyak, etc.) *shamans* would be classified as *shamans* by Samuel, because they are most often not creative in the manner he proposes. Some of the most conservative elements in Buryat society, and ones that most often were in conflict with Buddhist lamas, were the *shamans*. From the time of Kökhöchü's support of and competition with Genghis Khan down to the reemergence of *shamans* in the post-Soviet world, it would seem that actual *shamans* are more interested in the preservation of archaic forms than in creativity *per se*, and that is precisely why they are of such interest to research in religion.

Anthropological categories (nomothetic or not) may also be assessed by their attention to such factors as psychological set and ecological setting, and in this case Samuel's construct of *shamanism* may not be very helpful. Both set and setting have been considered in Hultkrantz's perspicacious essay "Ecological and Phenomenological Aspects of Shamanism," in V. Diószegi and M. Hoppál, eds., *Shamanism in Siberia*, Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978, pp. 27–58. Reacting to the condemnation of the term "shamanism" by Clifford Geertz and others as the most insipid and meaningless of anthropological terms, Hultkrantz points out that "shamanism is deeply anchored in the old hunting cultures with their individualism, animal-spirit beliefs and hunting symbolism." Thus, we might first locate *shamanism* in that setting, and the more recent work by Piers Vitebsky, *Shamanism*, Norman Oklahoma: University of Okla-

homa Press, 2001, takes a similar approach. Yet the Buddhist tantric system is grounded in political, not hunting, metaphors, and the yogin achieves success by gaining powers so that he becomes the king of the *vidyādhara*s. The tribal component in tantrism is derivative, by appropriating half-understood rites and images from indigenous hunting cultures, but only to the degree that these support the dominant political metaphor.

With reference to psychological set, Roger Walsh has attempted to provide an organizational chart of psychic patterns in his “Mapping Different States of Consciousness Comparing Shamanic, Schizophrenic, Insight Meditation and Yogic States,” in Ruth Inge-Heinze, ed., *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on the Study of Shamanism and Alternate Modes of Healing*, Berkeley: Independent Scholars of Asia, 1988, 16–22. By his standards, all of these are different in greater or lesser measure, and assist us in understanding the parameters of such psychological events. For his part, Samuel attempts to include both yogic systems and normative Buddhist meditative practices as the tools of the *shaman*, an inclusiveness that does not account for the differing states of mind found in the silent contemplation of personal dissolution in *niṣpannakrama*, for example, as opposed to the violent seizures seen in the oracle-priests of gNas-chung monastery or in the local lha-pa of Tibetan villages. Here the value of an omnibus set “*shamanism*” must be particularly questioned as to whether it does not occlude more than it informs.

Samuel’s emphasis is in some measure comprehensible, for the lure of the designation of *shamanism* has been sufficiently difficult to resist, that Frederick M. Smith, in his masterful new work on spirit possession in South Asia, *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2006, found himself obliged to consider whether spirit possession in India is somehow related to *shamanism*. To his credit, Smith differentiated the two, and concluded, “It is clear that most possession is not shamanic, *strictu sensu*, even when the term is used,” (*The Self Possessed*, 65) and quotes with approval Jorden Papers’s similar result with respect to spirit possession in China.

Perhaps Samuel’s argument would be more persuasive if it were better grounded in the primary sources in their original languages (Tibetan, Sanskrit, Nepali), but this is another difficulty with the essays in this book. Only one, the essay on the cult of Gesar — where Samuel is on solid ground, having done very good work in this area — cites indigenous sources that contribute evidence to the discussion. Samuel’s announcement that he will eventually bring out a monograph on Gesar with Professor Yang Enhong of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences is good news indeed in this regard. The majority of the Samuel’s essays, though, cull from secondary sources as their principal domain.

As a consequence, much of the current collection must be considered based on too little evidence to be more than speculative observations on the nature of Tibetan religion, tantrism, Buddhist systems and the rest. Indeed, I know of no major figure in the study of Tibetan religion or esoteric Buddhism who has accepted Samuel's 1993 thesis on *shamanism*, and most have simply identified it as an unhelpful position rather than a solid contribution. While Samuel's insights in this volume may prove to be fruitful in some regard, most students of Tibetan or Indian religion will find them of limited utility.

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Buddhist Goddesses of India. By MIRANDA SHAW. Princeton, Oxford, Princeton University Press 2006. Pp. xi + 571. ISBN 0-691-12758-1 (hardback). \$35.00.

This book is a gallery of beautifully and skillfully drawn portraits of twenty-two Buddhist goddesses and groups of goddesses; it enables non-specialists to recognize their images and to get acquainted with the legends associated with them. Separated into three groups, according to the three stages of the development of Buddhism (Early Buddhism, Mahayana and Vajrayana), these deities are fortunate to have been written about by an author possessing such a pronounced sensibility for the feminine aspects of religious traditions — and of Buddhist tradition in particular — a sensibility clearly demonstrated in her previous publications. Not only has her *Passionate Enlightenment* established itself as one of the authoritative texts on the position of women in *tantric* Buddhism, but it has become a bestseller too. The aim of this her latest work is to show that “these goddesses are not marginal to Buddhist thought and practice but play an integral and often prominent role in their varied religious settings” (1). Shaw herself situates her work within the domain of goddess studies (12) and outlines the main features of her approach as “a comprehensive overview of each goddess, including the dates of her emergence in literary and artistic sources, her iconographic evolution and range of epiphanies, the types of practices in which she figures, and original and evolving ideas of her nature and religious roles” (2). Shaw’s book thus attempts to sketch a series of portraits of what are living, changing entities (4–5) and her method — joining text, image, history and function in a given cultural context — is innovative.

I shall limit my own comments chiefly to the book’s problematical title — though the work is otherwise excellent in many respects. Although the author is perfectly aware of the difficulties inherent in applying the term “goddess” to the feminine creatures of another culture (discussed in details, 9f.), to my mind the problem remains unresolved. I can hardly imagine a book called “*Male Buddhist Gods of India*”, because such a selection, based on the grounds of the deity’s sexual identity, is hardly justifiable.¹ The note on the importance of the parallel analysis of male deities appears only on the penultimate page, 451. There is no explanation in Shaw’s book as to why she has chosen to concentrate only on goddesses. The serious reader would need to know what exactly is lacking in all the preceding literature that makes this new book dedicated to only the goddesses a necessary addition. The only aspect of the current state of understanding, however, that Shaw evokes as explanation

¹ My experience of writing about *yoginīs* has shown that gender of such grammatically feminine figures cannot be taken for granted and it takes pages to explain that *yoginīs*

comes in her rather bold statement that most extant publications on Buddhist goddesses are limited only to iconographical and historical features (2). This seems ingenuous, as Shaw is familiar with the admirable works on Tārā and Vajrayoginī, *Chinnamūṇḍā* and *yakṣas* (including *yakṣiṇīs*), by, respectively, Beyer, English, Benard and Sutherland, which were not limited to these questions.

The term *devī* is freely and frequently used in Buddhist texts. It is applied not only to Tārā — also termed a female Buddha (313f.) — but to almost any feminine figure. The term *deva*, however, is employed to signify a group of deities whose rank is lower than all sorts of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas etc. (A note on this appears in the epilogue, 449). Such a classification was employed by Buddhists to mark the difference of their identity by distinguishing themselves from a more general religious and cultural context, and especially from those worshipping various *devas*. Thus, the terms *deva* and *devī* do not seem to refer to the masculine and feminine forms of a word whose differences are significant only in terms of gender, but rather to two different concepts in Buddhist texts. While *deva* means a class of lesser divinities in the Buddhist hierarchy, *devī* seems to constitute a simple honorific. An explanation of this sort is needed for a proper understanding of the historical situation.

The next question one may ask is whether all the twenty-two entities chosen for the book can in fact be called goddesses. Miranda Shaw opts to answer in the affirmative on the grounds that all of them can be called *devī*. But her choice only gives rise to further interrogations.

Firstly, just how representative are the goddesses chosen by Miranda Shaw from among all the different sorts of feminine beings, symbols and concepts in Buddhist texts and images? The author herself states that she chose to work with the major goddesses of the Buddhist pantheon (2). Yet it remains hard for the reader to work out how significant the chosen goddesses actually are. In order to see their position more clearly, I read all the Sanskrit entries bearing feminine names in the *Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography* by Lokesh Chandra.² My method is not foolproof inasmuch as the names of some of these goddesses are not to be found in extant Sanskrit sources but were rather restored from Tibetan texts. This notwithstanding, the number of such entries is some six-hundred and fifty in total, and all the goddesses described by Shaw —

might be linked to a number of male figures of which none is their equal. It becomes possible, therefore, to consider them as an independent class of exclusively feminine beings.

² Lokesh Chandra, *Dictionary of Buddhist Iconography*, Vol. 1–15, New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan 2005.

except for those from *Flower Ornament Scripture* — are included. It needs to be affirmed outright that there seems to be nothing about the chosen feminine figures that can allow their organization in a discrete group. Moreover, given the huge number of other feminine deities, we are curious to know whether the goddesses constitute a separate group among them or if, on the other hand, all feminine figures can be called goddesses. The author, unfortunately, does not comment on this aspect.

The question as to whether the chaotic lists of all sorts of feminine figures in Buddhist, as well as Hindu (Indian in the larger cultural sense) traditions can be organized or classified in some way, is an immensely difficult one. I shall further examine the list of these feminine deities, because, it would seem to me that this is the only way to — at least — attempt to discover what makes Shaw's twenty-two chosen figures special. I would propose a few intersecting and overlapping criteria that might allow coherent groupings to be identified among the plethora of feminine figures available in order to discern some logic behind Shaw's choice.

The first criterion is the independent nature of the chosen figures. It appears that none of the twenty-two feminine figures and their groups described in the book has any clear male counterpart. They are independent and solitary goddesses. This allows us to eliminate such goddesses who are the partners of Buddhas or Bodhisattvas, as well as any other female figure whose male counterpart appears to be more important than she.

The second criterion is the central position of the goddess in a text, cult or image. This aspect allows all sorts of servant-goddesses — representing different symbolic offerings such as light, incense, dance, etc. — to be eliminated from the list. The same criterion permits us to exclude those goddesses who represent only one element of a group.

Shaw, however, does not eliminate all such groups of goddesses: she decided to keep the *yakṣiṇīs* and the group from the *Flower Ornament Scripture*. With regard to the *yakṣiṇīs*, female figures with such a name are known to all the major traditions of India: they appear in *purāṇas* and epics; in Jain texts; they are important figures in early *śaiva tantric* texts; the list is not exhaustive. They would appear, however, to originate in the most ancient epic and *purāṇic* texts, representing the *brahmanical* tradition for the wider public. In these texts *yakṣiṇīs*, are, first of all, feminine forms of the *yakṣas* and both male and female figures have equal importance in them.³ Secondly, they are only one of eight or fourteen classes of beings considered to have divine origin. These classifica-

³ Gail Sutherland, *The Disguises of the Demon. The Development of the Yakṣa in Hinduism and Buddhism*, Albany: State University of New York Press 1991.

tions were not broken or replaced in Buddhist traditions. Why then not also include *rākṣasīs* or *piśācis*, for example? Do these *yakṣiṇīs* provide some sort of information that the others do not? The reason for the author's choice is, unfortunately, not divulged.

The inclusion of the goddesses from the *Flower Ornament Scripture* allows us to come back to the question of what a goddess is. When we have deities such as Tārā, Vajrayoginī and others capable of being the chief chosen deity of a given devotee and whose importance in Buddhist tradition cannot be questioned, could there have been people worshiping *yakṣiṇīs* as goddesses in this sense, even occasionally? Can we bestow the appellation of goddess to a feminine figure whose importance, or even her very existence, is limited to one text only? What then is a goddess?

Finally, among the twenty-two entries, we encounter some goddesses who, though they can be inscribed within larger arrangements, are nonetheless represented as one and unique goddess. Aparājītā, for instance, has a long history of being one of the group of the four goddesses accompanying Tumburu-bhairava in both buddhist and *śaiva tantric* literature. Tumburu and his four sisters are the central deities of the *Vīṇāśikha tantra* (v. 31f., 96f., 126f.), they are also described in details in *Netra tantra* (11.12f.), and it is well-known that Jayā, Vijayā, Ajitā and Aparājītā are invoked in *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa* (throughout — in 2.16, 45.182, 47.20f. and 51, 48.54 and 96 — the four goddesses are mentioned together with Tumburu). It would be interesting to discover how Aparājītā as a solitary goddess might be related to this group of four.⁴

Further questions arise from this: what does it mean to be a Buddhist goddess and what is the basis of their selection? Among the twenty-two entries, Pṛthivī, *yakṣiṇīs*, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, *yoginīs* — of whom Vajrayoginī is an example, and especially Chinnamuṇḍā have a long history, being part of Hindu traditions. Chinnamuṇḍā, for instance, is only one from a group of ten goddesses known as *mahāvīdyās*. But if one chooses one of them, why not chose to address the class of deities called *mātrkāś*, who are also important in Hindu as well as in Buddhist traditions? Shaw addresses them anyway on p. 56, 90, 118, 127, 212, 287 each time, however, giving them different characteristics. And why not discuss whether Hindu goddesses such as Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī have different qualities in Buddhist tradition than those they possess

⁴ Madhusudan Kaul Shastri (ed.), *The Netra Tantram. With Commentary by Kṣemarāja*, Vol. 1–2, Bombay: Tatva Vivechaka Press 1926 and 1939. Teun Goudriaan (ed., tr.), *The Vīṇāśikha Tantra. A Śaiva Tantra of the Left Current*. Delhi, Varanasi: Motilal Banarsidass 1985. Ganapati Shastri (ed.), *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, Vol. 1–3, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications 1989.

in Hindu texts and images. If they do not, then can they really be considered as Buddhist? Unfortunately, all these questions remained unanswered.

My criticisms concern also the choice of images presented in the book. Among numerous images, we encounter a large number originating from Pakistan/Afganistan, Thailand, Nepal, Tibet, China or Mongolia. This prompts me to ask what exactly it is that Shaw means by India. Is it a territory corresponding to the frontiers of the modern state of that name? Or is it a much larger territory which fell under the influence of Indian culture during a certain historic period? Why should a reader consider modern Nepali paintings as being representative of the Mahayana layer of Indian culture without any explanation beyond the brief note on p. 2? If such images as would provide material proof of the importance of a particular goddess are absent within the actual borders of India during a given historical period, is it really so easily justifiable to extrapolate images from another cultural environment altogether?

I think that many of the problems I have alluded to could be solved by the simple expedient of changing the title of the book, which is, as I have shown, misleading. To better advertise the real contents of the book, I would propose something along the lines of: “*Female Figures in Buddhist Traditions: An Analysis of Selected Figures on the Basis of the Indic* (in the cultural sense, a term used by the author herself, p. 2) *Visual and Textual Materials*”.

There are some other minor problems. It seems that *Devī Māhātmya* is later than the sixth century (313), on account of the influence of the material of the *Ur-Skanda purāṇa* that it contains.⁵

As for the question of *yoginīs* (365) and that *vajra* can be seen as a distinguishing symbol of Buddhist *yoginīs*, this is not correct: various *śaiva tantric* deities hold *vajra*, for example, Svachchandaḥhairava (*Svacchandatantra* 2.92 and also his consort in 2.125) and many Kālī-like goddesses in *Jayadrathayāmala*.⁶ *Vajra* is originally a Hindu symbol, known already to early purāṇas, and even to the *Mahābhārata* (the word appears more than six-hundred times in various forms and as a part of different compositions). Indra and Aindrī (a *mātrkā* reflecting the name and the image of the ancient god) both hold *vajra*. Even

⁵ Yuko Yokochi, *The Rise of the Warrior Goddess in Ancient India. A Study of the Myth-Cycle of Kauṣikī-Vindhyavāsini in the Skandapurāṇa*, Doct. diss., Groningen 2004. (Unpub.) Yuko Yokochi proposes the second half of the eighth century as the most probable date of *Devī Māhātmya*, p. 359.

⁶ Madhusudan Kaul Shastri (ed.), *Svacchandatantra*, Vol. 1-6, Bombay: Nirnaya Sagar 1921-1935. Alexis Sanderson, *Deities from “The Visualization of the Deities in Trika”*. (Unpubl. variant of 13.02.2005).

the name Vajrayoginī is not specifically Buddhist, it is also used in *śaiva* texts, namely in *mantras*.⁷ As for the bone ornaments of *yoginīs*, it seems that the *śaiva* vision of these provided in the book by David Lorenzen might be of some use here, but this author is not present in Shaw's bibliography.⁸

My final remark concerns Shaw's use of the term *tantric*. It does not only refer to Vajrayana Buddhism (186, 190, 213). For example, on p. 140 the term refers to a set of Buddhist texts dealing with divination and exorcism; the use of the term on pp. 200–201 makes it difficult to distinguish between *tantric* and *yogic*, *tantric* and tribal; while on p. 205, ancient rituals of *yakṣiṇī*-attraction are qualified as *tantric*. P. 218 leaves the impression that all many-armed and many-faced deities are likely to be *tantric*. The term is nowhere defined.

These points are, however, minor and they do not harm much the content of this excellent book allowing us to see female Buddhist figures in life on the basis of innovative methodological approach bringing together the texts and the images, which, I hope, will be developed in details in the future publications of Miranda Shaw.

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⁷ Olga Serbaeva, *Yoginīs in Śaiva Purāṇs and Tantras. Their Role in Transformative Experiences in a Historical and Comparative Perspective*. Doct. diss., University of Lausanne 2006, p. 27. (Unpub.)

⁸ David Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālamukhas. Two Lost Śaivite Sects*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass 1991, p. 2.

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Religion through the Senses

For far too long, religion has been equated with doctrine, especially with those systematized doctrines known as “theologies.” In many cases, it has been the theologians themselves who have been in charge of presenting in an apologetic manner the doctrinal systems elaborated by their predecessors, after having transformed those systems to suit contemporary assumptions. But even in the absence of an apologetic intention, scholars have tended to study the normative, textual, versions of the traditions with which they have been concerned, in many cases disregarding the lived, physical, components of those traditions. When some attention was paid to practices that did not lend themselves to theological systematization or which seemed to contradict orthodoxy or orthopraxy, those practices were generally labeled as “heretical” or as “superstitious,” thereby assuming, implicitly or explicitly, a theological position — although it should not be forgotten that a distrust or even outright condemnation of religious practices embedded in physicality is also found among those “heretics” who reject hegemonic religions, such as Roman Catholicism, which make ample use of the material world in their liturgies.¹ While there have always been exceptions, particularly among anthropologists, to the dematerialized approaches just described, it is only now that we find a concerted effort to do justice to the physical aspects of religion. Two of the papers published in this thematic issue of *Numen*, those by Holly Gayley and Kerry Skora, were originally presented at the session “Religion through the Senses” of the Critical Theory and Discourses of Religion Group of the American Academy of Religion, which took place in Washington, on 18 November 2006. We hope that, together with the contribution by James McHugh, these three papers will show the extent to which all the senses,

¹ See Gustavo Benavides, “Magic,” in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. Robert A. Segal, Oxford: Blackwell 2006, 295–308.

and not just sight and hearing, have played and continue to play a crucial role in the religious lives of Indian and Tibetan practitioners.

We hope also that the textual, historical, philosophical and ethnographic approaches found in papers such as the ones being published here will be eventually integrated with research being carried out by ethologists, psychologists and other scientists. This is already taking place in the case of the cognitive approach to religion, one of the most promising recent developments in the field of religious studies. Extending the cognitive approach, which has tended to explore conceptual issues, it is necessary to pay more attention to tactility, taste and smell. Regarding smell, for example, besides considering its role in the liturgies of a number of religions, one should investigate the extent to which the various odors used in ritual contexts condition our behavior.² Similarly, in addition to studying from a social science perspective the role of smell in one of religion's main functions, namely that of creating symbolic boundaries,³ it is necessary to pay attention to research that shows how and to what extent the recognition of smell actually takes place. In some cases, this recognition happens at the most elementary level, facilitating the connection between a lactating mother and her infant;⁴ in others, it seems to occur at a more general level, in relation to the recognition of kin;⁵ while in some cases olfactory recognition of kin seems to draw a boundary around those closest to oneself, creating an aversion that leads to the avoidance of inbreeding.⁶ Even though parent–child and, in general, family relations, ethnic identity, and incest have been the subject of endless mythological elaboration, those myths having been subject to ingenious scholarly interpretations, the type of

² M.D. Kirk-Smith, C. van Toller, G.H. Dodd, "Unconscious Odour Conditioning in Human Subjects," *Biological Psychology* 17 (1983) 221–231.

³ Constance Classen, "The Odor of the Other: Olfactory Symbolism and Cultural Categories," *Ethos* 20 (1992) 133–166.

⁴ Richard H. Porter, Jan Winberg, "Unique Salience of Maternal Breast Odors for Newborn Infants," *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Review* 23 (1999) 439–449.

⁵ Richard H. Porter, Jennifer M. Cernoch, Rene D. Balogh, "Odor Signatures and Kin Recognition," *Physiology and Behavior* 34 (1985) 445–448.

⁶ Glen E. Weisfeld, Tiffany Czilli, Krista A. Phillips, James A. Gall, Cary M. Lichtman, "Possible Olfaction-based Mechanisms in Human Kin Recognition and Inbreeding Avoidance," *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 85 (2003) 279–295.

research mentioned above does not, as a rule, make an appearance in history of religions or, more generally, in humanities or social sciences publications, in some cases as the result of the current social constructionism vogue. But even those who adhere to this fashion need to realize that in order to recognize the out of the ordinary nature of a religious claim — such as, for instance, a case of levitation — one must compare that claim with what our ordinary assumptions about the natural world lead us to expect, just as the prowess of a ballet dancer appears to us as such only when contrasted with what our everyday experience tells us about the nature of bodies and the effects of gravity.

The Editors

The Classification of Smells and the Order of the Senses in Indian Religious Traditions

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Abstract

In the course of producing complex analyses of sensory experience, traditional Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist scholars in South Asia examined the nature of smell. These scholars were most often interested in the fundamental qualities of smells, i.e. how many types of odor there are. Faced with this difficult task, the three sectarian groups initially produced three different accounts, though in later works most scholars adopted very similar classifications of smell. In part, this may be because of the difficulties involved in classifying smells, but the article also suggests that it was mutually beneficial to abandon contentious material in less significant parts of a system in order to focus discussion on more central issues. Amongst all the sense-objects, odors were most consistently defined by terms implying an aesthetic value. The article also examines the place of the sense of smell within the three different orders of the senses that these three schools of thought used. These sense-orders reflect divergent classificatory principles, and the place of smell in relation to the other senses highlights different aspects of the sense of smell. Unlike their stance on the classification of odors, the three schools of thought always maintained distinct orders of the senses, which must have been a regular reminder of difference in philosophical priorities.

Keywords

smell, odors, senses, classification, India

Introduction

In the vast Sanskrit epic, the *Mahābhārata*, at one point Yudhiṣṭhira, newly anointed king after the victory of the Pāṇḍava brothers in battle, is instructed in the merits of generosity by the revered elder Bhīṣma, who is lying on a bed of arrows. In response to one particular question,

Bhīṣma relates a dialogue¹ in which Bali, king of the *asuras*,² questions his mentor, Śukra, concerning the karmic results of offerings of flowers and other fragrant materials. As a part of Śukra's interesting answer he relates the following:

*dvividho hi smṛto gandha iṣṭo 'niṣṭaś ca puṣpajāḥ
iṣṭagandhāni devānāṃ puṣpāṇīti vibhāvayet*

For the smell produced from flowers is taught as of two types: desirable and undesirable. One should recognize that the flowers with desirable scent are for the gods. (*Mahābhārata*,³ *Anuśāsanaparvan* 13.101.26)

This does not appear to be a particularly significant statement — that the scent of flowers is both desirable and undesirable. Indeed, it seems a rather obvious point, for although flowers generally smell fragrant, nevertheless some do not, and accordingly one would only tend to offer the fragrant variety to the gods. Yet there is more to this than we might at first think, for this is not just a casual observation about the smell of flowers, but rather this comment is a reference to a carefully considered philosophical classification of odor. For many centuries, educated South Asian readers (or hearers) of this dialogue would, no doubt, have understood that Śukra is basing his explanation of the offering of flowers to gods on a technical account of the fundamental qualities of the object of the sense of smell — elucidating and justifying the use of certain materials in ritual worship by relating this practice to a philosophical account of the fundamental nature of the world.

Anyone who has ever tried will be aware that producing a finite enumeration or classification of smells is quite a difficult task.⁴ Though motivated by different philosophical and theological agendas, a number of South Asian scholars from the last few centuries B.C.E. until the mid first millennium C.E. consciously tried to produce such a

¹ He relates this as spoken by Manu.

² A class of divine beings, sometimes translated as “demons.”

³ All references to the *Mahābhārata* (except Nilakaṇṭha's commentary) refer to the Pune critical edition by Sukthankar *et al.*

⁴ For a discussion of numerous Western, and for the most part relatively recent, attempts at a solution, see chapter two in Harper, Bate Smith and Land 1968.

classification as part of various larger attempts to describe the fundamental nature of the world and of experience. In this paper, I will first examine the history of these attempts to classify smells, as produced by thinkers with Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist sectarian affiliation. Noting the manner in which different sectarian accounts became increasingly similar over the centuries, I will reflect on the possible reasons for this occurrence. In the next part of the paper, I examine how the sense of smell itself was classified, with particular reference to its place in the order of the senses. Hindu philosophers, Jains, and Buddhists tended to list the senses in distinct orders, and I will examine the classificatory principles behind these orders, noting that these principles do indeed reflect broader religious interests. I will also consider what aspects of smelling and smells are emphasized by the different sense-orders. After examining these sectarian philosophical sources, I will also briefly consider the role of the sense of smell in Indian medicine — a discipline that, unsurprisingly, has important things to say about the body and the senses. Finally, I will discuss the implications of the contrast between the evolving classification of odors, and the inflexible classification of the senses, especially in terms of what this tells us more generally about the history of ideas in a religiously diverse community.

Although in recent years the role of the senses in the history of religion has come under increasing scrutiny, the place of smell in South Asian religions has yet to be examined. In South Asia, aromatics often play a prominent role in religious rituals, and olfactory imagery and metaphors feature in many religious texts. Given the prominence of smells and smelling in South Asian religion, it is important to consider the conscious theoretical discussions of smell that South Asian traditional scholars produced. As I noted above, these somewhat scholastic debates on smell did not exist in a vacuum, and the fruits of this theoretical reflection could be used to explain and understand the role of smell in other aspects of religious culture.

The study of traditional South Asian theoretical material concerning smell and the senses plays an indispensable role in the study of the senses in South Asian religious and cultural history more generally. The historical study of South Asian religions — Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist — generally relies quite heavily on the study of texts, and therefore an understanding of the theory of smell and the order of the

senses as known to the traditional South Asian scholar, is an important prelude to good reading of texts in many genres. As Alain Corbin, who produced one of the most important historical studies of the sense of smell (Corbin 1986 [1982]), has noted with regard to the more recent history of the senses:

Before embarking on an enquiry, they [historians] must know the representations of the sensory system and the ways in which it functioned. In short, they must be capable of deciphering all the references and of detecting the logic of the evidence ordered by the dominant scientific convictions of the period under consideration. Clearly, a document subject to belief in the theory of animal spirits cannot be analysed using the same key as a text that refers to the cerebral topography outlined by Brocq. The way in which authors see the localization and configuration or the central seat of sensibility, the circulation of messages by the circuit of nerves, is essential to an understanding of their writings. It implicitly orders their perception of the hierarchy of the senses. . . . (Corbin 2005:134)

In studying South Asian textual sources on the senses we are entirely lacking detailed secondary studies of the foundational theories of smell, and of the hierarchy of the senses; this paper fills this gap, and will enable us to begin reading a variety of other texts on the senses, such as the passage from the *Mahābhārata* quoted earlier, in a whole new light. The case of South Asia is also interesting from a comparative point of view, for whereas in European intellectual life discussion of the senses was for a long time dominated by the classical Greek hierarchy of the senses, as we will see below, in South Asia three different orders of the senses were used by scholars belonging to three important sectarian groups, who all produced a large number of texts, and who were in dialogue with each other. Thus, with regard to the role of smell in South Asia, we cannot necessarily assign it one place in intellectual life, even amongst scholars and the educated elite. Depending on the sectarian context, and also on the emphasis in classification, the place of smell in the order of the senses could change quite radically.

A History of Minor Ideas: The Analysis of Odors in South Asia

Despite the importance of this article to our more general understanding of the intellectual context of smell in textual sources for South Asian

religion, it would not be quite honest to claim that the investigation of the nature of smell was ever central to traditional South Asian intellectual life itself. Indeed, the nature of the sense of smell was somewhat peripheral to the main concerns of the schools of thought we shall be discussing. Yet as actual debates must have been far more numerous and diverse than those recorded, it seems quite likely the difficulties surrounding the sense of smell were being reformed in a constant dialogue. For this to happen, smell need not have been the central topic of debate, but rather, as part of a well-stocked armory of definitions that debaters had at their disposal, ideas about smell, and many other minor issues, would constantly need to be kept in respectable working order.

Smell is an important subject to consider in South Asian religious traditions for several additional reasons. First of all, as we shall see below, the relative unimportance of this topic proves in itself interesting, for it would appear that ideas concerning this minor issue developed in a manner quite unlike those concerning more central, important issues. The history of ideas may well not follow the same course when the idea in question is not of enormous importance to the traditions that are in dialogue, yet much of the bulk of several important philosophical and religious texts from South Asia is, in fact, concerned with a vast number of such points of smaller importance, and thus a detailed history of one minor idea may shed light on the broader history of a large part of the body of these texts — after all, these numerous questions clearly still mattered to South Asian scholars, and thus they should be important for us.

Also, the peculiar nature of smell makes, I believe, for a particularly interesting debate. Smell is part of the world of everyday human experience, and though the true and absolute nature of this world may be subject to fierce debate dealing with matters transcendental, the debate on smell discussed below is generally sheltered from these wider concerns, conveniently restricting the discussion. Furthermore, smell, though a mundane and near universal aspect of human experience, is notoriously hard to analyze. Other aspects of sensory experience do not seem quite so difficult. How many tastes are there? How many primary colors are there? Though we many not always agree on our answers, it is nevertheless not hard to think of an answer. But consider: How many smells are there? What are the “primary smells”? These are not such easy

questions to answer, and agreement on the right answer may be even harder. Faced with a restricted, but tricky, topic of discussion, it is interesting to see how the thinkers discussed below responded.

Finally, the various analyses of odor these scholars produced all have one thing in common — that some, if not all, of the fundamental qualities of odors (for example, “fragrant”) are what we would think of as value-laden aesthetic terms, implying an aesthetic judgment. Yet these qualities are presented as belonging to the odors themselves, not to the perceiver, thus locating aesthetic values in the external world⁵ on a very fundamental level. In this respect odors are particularly special, and the experience of smelling as understood by these scholars in these discourses is unlike any other sense experience.

Aside from the smell-related theoretical ideas that Indian scholars thought to be of importance, and what this says about Indian thought, we will also examine one aspect of the senses considered more broadly. Theoretical discussions of smells almost always take place in the context of discussions of the sense faculties and objects of the senses in general. The place of smell amongst the other senses — where it lies in any given order of senses — is something we will also consider. Where smell finds itself in the context of the other senses can tell us a lot about smell itself. This leads to a consideration of the order of senses in Indian thought more generally, a close examination of which proves quite interesting. Again, I should emphasize that this is not to be an investigation of how the senses work, but rather of how they are classified, and in particular in what order they tend to be listed, and why.

As we shall see below, there are three given orders of the senses in the texts I have chosen, and these correspond to Hindu, Jain, and Buddhist schools of thought. Indeed these three separate orders of the senses seem to be very old indeed. They are found quite regularly, though not universally, in our sources from the earliest onwards, and it is on the basis of these sectarian divisions that I have organized the first part of the essay. In addition to this “horizontal” sectarian structure, within each category I then present the texts chronologically as far as possible

⁵ At least, as far as a particular school of thought believed the world was external and real.

given the usual difficulties in dating very old South Asian texts, for I would also like to consider the history of ideas concerning odors.

First I will examine some Hindu texts, presenting passages from the *Mahābhārata*, and then some texts from the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophical schools. I then go on to consider Jain and Buddhist materials respectively. Finally, I shall discuss the issue of the order of the senses and the place of medical literature before I conclude the discussion.

Some Hindu Smells

We will begin by examining smells as presented in the Hindu tradition. It would appear that the earliest Hindu source on the classification of smells is a passage from the *Mahābhārata*. Though smells are mentioned in many contexts in numerous early texts, I am not aware of any explicit treatment of the classification of smell prior to the passage below.⁶

I will discuss this passage from the *Mahābhārata* in the same section as some passages from texts produced by a school of thought frequently referred to as Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika because of the close association of two philosophical schools: the logically and epistemologically oriented Nyāya school, and the more ontologically oriented Vaiśeṣika school. Both the passage in the *Mahābhārata*, and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika texts display some notable features of what Frauwallner, coining a new category, calls the “nature-philosophical” school of Indian philosophy (Frauwallner 1973, vol. 2:6). This school, he claims, is characterized by an interest in the nature of the external world, as well as a doctrine of individual souls. He places both Jainism and Vaiśeṣika philosophy in this category, as well as the dialogue below from the *Mahābhārata*. Indeed it would seem that close consideration of the latter passage does indeed suggest that it shares several concerns with Jainism, and it does appear to be in conversation with schools of thought that have concerns that we might identify as typically Jain, e.g. the notion of the soul-like entity called

⁶ Though some early *Upaniṣads* do discuss the senses, they contain no material comparable to that which we discuss here on the classification of the fundamental qualities of odor. Although a study of the senses in the *Upaniṣads* would no doubt be very valuable, this part of the history of the categorization of the senses unfortunately lies beyond the scope of the present article.

the “life” (*jīva*), and the debate as to which senses plants may be said to possess.⁷

In addition to the individual soul, another hallmark of one branch of this general school of thought, represented by the Bhṛgu/Bharadvāja passage and Vaiśeṣika philosophy, is an interest in the elements and their qualities, as well as the related belief in a connection between the elements and the senses. Indeed, in terms of early materials of this particular school of thought, this passage from the *Mahābhārata* and the Nyāya/Vaiśeṣika texts are our earliest sources. The belief in a connection between the elements and the senses in turn produces a tendency to order the senses in a distinctive manner, which further sets the passages in this section apart from all Jain and Buddhist discussions of the senses.

Smells in the Mahābhārata Epic

In the *Mokṣadharma* section of the *Śāntiparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, a discussion of the senses, in a dialogue between the two sages Bhṛgu and

⁷ With regard to the dialogue of Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja, there are indeed several similarities with Jainism. As Frauwallner notes (1973, vol. 1:104) the term *jīva* is used to refer to the “soul.” Also, plants are discussed as sentient beings; they are, for example, said to be able to smell:

*punyāpunyais tathā gandhair dhūpaiś ca vividhair api
arogāḥ puspitāḥ santi tasmā jighranti pādapāḥ*

Likewise, by means of good and bad perfumes and also various incenses
They are free from disease and in flower. Therefore trees can smell. (*Mahābhārata* 12.177.14)

As in the early Jaina *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra* discussed below, there is in this passage a refutation of materialist philosophies. Clearly, the dialogue of Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja shares some terminology with the early Jains, and appears generally to be grappling with similar issues. Yet, notably, the order of the senses and sense data are typically Hindu (see below), and though the Jains believe plants to be sentient, here they are said to have all five senses, unlike the Jain account I shall discuss below. The passage about the senses of plants might indeed be taken less as a proof that plants *are* sentient, and rather as a proof that sentient plants have *all five* senses. Whatever the true import of this passage, the result is that the Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja passage is not compatible with a hierarchy of types of beings ordered according to the number of senses they possess, which ultimately distinguishes it from Jain thinking.

Bharadvāja, is perhaps the earliest Hindu source to provide a technical discussion of the nature of smell.⁸ Here the concern, which will be the topic of our debate, is the nature of smells: What types of smell are there?

In a part of the epic narrative that precedes the passage we read above, when the battle between the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas is over, and Yudhiṣṭhira has been made king, on the advice of Lord Kṛṣṇa he returns to the battlefield to listen to the advice of the dying Bhīṣma. While discussing many philosophical matters covered in the ensuing *Mokṣadharmā* section, at one point Yudhiṣṭhira questions Bhīṣma about the material nature of the world: the elements, the castes (*varṇas*), the soul, and so on. In response to his query, Bhīṣma relates a dialogue between Bhṛgu and Bharadvāja. When discussing the nature of the elements, Bhṛgu relates a list of the varieties of the special quality of earth: smell.

⁸ Van Buitenen gives the broad range of 400 B.C.E. to 400 C.E., over which the *Mahābhārata* was most likely composed (Buitenen 1973:25). More recently, Hiltebeitel and Fitzgerald have proposed a narrower window for the composition of the text — approximately at some time within the first two centuries after the end of the Mauryan empire. Where Hiltebeitel suggests the text was composed over a relatively short time, Fitzgerald (2003:810–11) believes the composition took place over a longer period, with several important parts of the text, including possibly the passage we examine here, being added later. See also Hiltebeitel 2005. To complicate matters, Frauwallner (1973, vol. 1:79–80) claims that on “inner grounds,” i.e. the fact that it shows no Sāṃkhya influence, we can classify this passage as one of the earlier philosophical passages in the *Mokṣadharmā* section of the *Mahābhārata*. It is important here to distinguish between two questions: (1) When did this passage become part of the *Mahābhārata*? (the question that would concern Hiltebeitel and Fitzgerald), and (2) When was this passage originally composed? (the question that concerns Frauwallner and us). The *Mahābhārata* may have been composed over a short period of time, as Hiltebeitel suggests, or over a longer period, as Fitzgerald suggests, with our passage being a late addition. Yet neither of these composition-scenarios absolutely prevents us from accepting Frauwallner’s suggestion that our passage is very early material (that it may have been incorporated into a rapidly composed text, or added at a late date to a more slowly composed text). The only thing that would exclude such a possibility is the assertion of absolutely original authorship of the whole text at the time of composition. To conclude, on the basis of the above I am cautiously assuming that this passage probably dates at the latest from some time in the first two centuries B.C.E. or possibly earlier. As Bhattacharya notes (1983:248), the same dialogue, including this identical passage, occurs also in the *Nārada Purāṇa*, I. 42.81–83. Nambiar (1979:229) estimates that this was compiled sometime from 700–1000 C.E. incorporating the passage from the *Śāntiparvan*. I will therefore here consider this passage in the earlier context of the *Mahābhārata*.

The passage displays a number of interesting features, which are all the more noteworthy if one accepts Frauwallner's assertion of its relative early date:

*tasya gandhasya vakṣyāmi vistarābhibhitān guṇān
iṣṭaś cāniṣṭagandhaś ca madhuraḥ kaṭur eva ca
nirhārī samhataḥ snigdho rūkṣo viśada eva ca
evam navavidho jñeyah pārthivo gandhavistaraḥ*

I will relate the qualities, named in detail, of that smell:
desired and undesired smell, sweet and pungent,
diffusive, compact, smooth, rough, and pure
The array of smell, connected to earth, is thus known to be nine-fold
(*Mahābhārata Śāntiparvan* 12.177.27–28)

As with taste, the qualities (*guṇas*) of smell are for the most part given in pairs. The first pair is the most significant: desired and undesired. The terms attribute a value to smells and are not purely descriptive. It is notable that no neutral value is mentioned. The question then arises whether these qualities apply to all smells, or whether they are just two out of nine qualities of smell. Considering later presentations of the qualities of smell, we might think these qualities apply to all smells — the contents of the other categories being subsumed under “desired” and “undesired” — yet I think to say this would be going too far at this stage. Although these qualities are listed first, suggesting they are important, nevertheless, we should not conclude that the other qualities are all included under these two terms on the basis of this text alone.

The next pair of qualities, sweet and pungent (*madhura* and *kaṭu*) are qualities of taste, and indeed they are given in the list that follows the smells, which enumerates six tastes, (*rasas*):

*madhuro lavaṇas tiktah kaṣāyo 'mlah kaṭus tathā
eṣa ṣaḍvidhaviśtāro raso vārimayaḥ smṛtaḥ*

Sweet, salty, bitter, astringent, sour, also pungent. This six fold enumeration of taste, made of water, is taught. (*Mahābhārata* 12.177.30)

I have translated the next pair in the list as “diffusive” (*nirhārīn*) and “compact” (*samhata*). Both these terms describe not so much olfactory qualities as the first four terms do, but rather they refer to the physico-chemical properties of the odorant. They refer to how smells behave in

relation to time and space. These qualities are a feature of things that smell considered most broadly, but they are not types of smell. It would seem that this passage is trying to capture as many aspects of odorants as possible.

Given that the preceding terms (“sweet and pungent,” and so forth) appear to be listed in pairs, the next two can also easily be read together as a contrasting pair, something on the lines of smooth (*snigdha*) and rough (*rūkṣa*). It is important to note that just as the terms sweet and pungent primarily refer to tastes, so these terms may also refer to the objects of the sense of touch.

The final and challenging term, *viśada*, primarily means “clear,” “bright,” “pure,” and so on. Though sometimes translated as “pure,” the term does not refer to ritual purity, as, for instance, it is not used in important sources of Hindu religious law such as The Law Code of Manu (*Manusmṛti*), in the context of ritual purity. Also, unlike the terms “desired” and “undesired,” this term does not contrast with a term meaning “impure.” When applied to *food*, this term does contrast with “sharp/hard” (*khara*),⁹ where the distinction would appear to be between solid-hard and solid-soft foods.¹⁰ This word applied to *food* seems therefore to mean “soft,” but the meaning when applied to *taste* is not quite so clear — perhaps it refers to the taste of foods classified as soft, or possibly there is an extension in meaning to imply “mild in taste” in a pleasant and positive sense. Although a desirable smell, perhaps this term is nevertheless distinct from the desired (*iṣṭa*) smell seen above, which may include a courtesan’s mouth dripping with musky scarlet betel-wrap juice,¹¹ and instead implies something like the pleasant, yet also pure and mild (*viśada*) smell of a pot of cooked rice.¹²

⁹ According to Böhtlingk and Roth, *Sanskrit-Wörterbuch* 6:1207, as noted by Patañjali in the *Mahābhāṣya* on the grammatical *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini 7.3.69.

¹⁰ “All subsequent commentators have accepted Patañjali’s liberal interpretation of *bhaksya* in this *sūtra*, viz. that it stands both for solid (*khara-viśada*) and liquid (*drava*) foods” (Agrawala 1953:100).

¹¹ Nilakaṇṭha, the seventeenth century commentator on the *Mahābhārata* here supports this notion, giving as an example of a desired smell “musk etc.” (*kastūrikāḍau*) (ed. Kinjawadekar, vol. 5:319).

¹² The smell of boiled rice is the example given by Nilakaṇṭha in his commentary: *ibid.* 319.

Considered together, this list of qualities of smell is quite varied and ingenious. A series of pairs of qualities is applied to smells. Note that none of these terms are terms unique to smell:

- a contrasting pair of value terms,
- a contrasting pair of descriptive taste terms,
- a contrasting pair of terms describing the physical/diffusive properties of smells,
- a contrasting pair of descriptive touch terms,
- finally a single somewhat ambiguous term, also included in the list of touch qualities, and which is also applied to food elsewhere, and which may well attribute a delicacy, cleanliness, and/or good value of some sort to a smell.

Finally the passage explains that smell (*gandha*), is related to the element earth (*pārthiva*). This is significant as it connects this account of the objects of the senses with the idea that the senses and their objects correspond to the elements, and this will explain why of all the objects of sense, smells are discussed first. I will return to this important point in detail later.

This classification of smell constitutes a sophisticated and important analysis. Yet I am not claiming that the classification is remarkable because it postulates an objective classification of smells, and I am in no way judging them in comparison to some standard benchmark of achievement in the classification of smells, be it classical, scientific or otherwise;¹³ rather this analysis of smell is remarkable in terms of the

¹³ In his excellent paper (1983) on the classification of smell in India, to which I am indebted, Bhattacharya is quite eager to demonstrate the superiority of the “objective” classification seen here to the purely aesthetic ones found in later Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. He would prefer the later Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika classification to be “objective” and not aesthetic so as to be consistent with the other sense-object qualities given in the system. I think, however, that this later classification, given the difficulties of classifying smells, is a wise choice. Also, an *aesthetic* quality is only necessarily *subjective* in a system where the real world is devoid of objective values. The world of Indian philosophy, in which value-based categories such as *karma*, caste (*varṇa*), purity etc. may at times be real and objective (or at least as real and objective as a clod of earth), is not such a world. This is precisely what is so peculiar about smell in these systems — that, amongst all

extensive range of perspectives on smell and the variety of intellectual resources it draws on. This classification includes the aesthetic aspects of smells, as well as their physical characteristics.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Philosophy of Odors

In later texts of what is often known as the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy this correlation of the senses with the elements is retained. I will now look at some of these Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika sources, in which the hierarchy of the senses, based on the order of the elements, also remains characteristic.¹⁴

The foundational text of the Nyāya school, the early *Nyāyasūtra*¹⁵ itself does not discuss smell qualities, but Vātsyāyana's early¹⁶ commentary on it gives "desired," "undesired," and "disregardable":

sense qualities, smell alone is most consistently given a real aesthetic value. Yet, (unfortunately the following is never discussed) this *real* aesthetic value is presumably in some cases equally *really* contingent on the *real* caste (*varṇa*) status of the person smelling. According to traditional Hindu law, garlic is impure for brahmins, but lower castes may eat it. Presumably garlic is (at least in theory) repulsive to brahmins, and not repulsive to some other groups, and the same could be said to apply in the case of carrion and jackals. If the real, external, and aesthetic qualities of smell are additionally relational, the question arises of the aesthetic value of an un-smelt piece of garlic or carrion: is it potentially-fragrant-or-unfragrant-depending-on-the-caste-or-nature-of-the-potential-sniffer? It seems that in the multivalent hierarchical Hindu society and universe, any attempt to postulate objective aesthetic qualities will lead one to a situation where one has something more like caste-relative secondary qualities. As the nature of smell was not a contentious topic this sort of issue was not discussed.

¹⁴ For reasons of space, I have limited myself to texts of this school, which appears to be most rich in sources dealing with smell. It would also be quite interesting to examine smell in Sāṃkhya philosophy.

¹⁵ With regard to the date of the *Nyāyasūtra*, Potter notes "One may sum up the situation pretty safely by saying that we have not the vaguest idea who wrote the *Nyāyasūtras* or when he lived" (Potter 1977:221). Potter also notes the opinion of Oberhammer that chapter 3, which concerns us here, is of a later date, after the 4th century C.E. In fact, it is principally the commentary of Vātsyāyana that concerns us here, and on the dating of this text (which see below) Potter is fortunately more confident.

¹⁶ Potter "hazards" a date of 425 to 500 C.E., though he notes the opinion of Ingalls that the text dates from the 3rd century. An approximate date between the 3rd and the 5th century nevertheless places the *Nyāyabhāṣya* as most probably later than the *Mahābhārata* passage, and is sufficient to demonstrate the development of ideas I outline here. (Potter 1977:239.)

gandhā iṣṭāniṣṭopekṣaṇīyāḥ

Smells are desired, undesired and disregardable. (Vātsyāyana's commentary on *Nyāyasūtra* 3.1.57)

This commentary is probably the earliest Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika text to list the qualities of smell. The *Mahābhārata* list has been reduced to the aesthetic categories only. Smells are no longer described using the terminology of other senses, nor is there any reference to the physico-chemical properties, just to the value of the smells. Yet here, a third quality, “disregardable” has been added. This term could refer to a neutral smell, neither good or bad. Alternatively it could mean a smell that is overlooked because it is so faint. This latter option may seem strange but in the light of other sources considered below, this possibility may also make sense. The meaning “disregardable/overlookable” could imply both — that the smell is disregarded because it has no aesthetic impact, or because it is not even smelt in the first place. This threefold classification of smell is not unlike one of the Buddhist classifications of smell we shall consider below.

Vaiśeṣika, with its ontological tendencies, is the school of thought most strongly associated with the theory that the elements and senses are connected. Thus in the passage below it is not the qualities of smell that are given, but rather the qualities of earth that are given. Yet, earth is special with regard to smell in that earth alone possesses smell. Only in the commentary on this definition of earth are we given the qualities of smell and the other sense objects. Indeed, for the school of thought that correlates the senses to the elements, there is a significant gap in time from the first statement of the qualities of the sense objects in the *Mahābhārata* to the later ones from the fifth/sixth century.

Where Vātsyāyana gives the qualities of smell as “desired, undesired and disregardable,” Candrānanda,¹⁷ and indeed all other writers in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika from this point onwards, uses only the two terms “fragrant” (*surabhi*) and “unfragrant” (*asurabhi*). The third term meaning either “neutral” or “unnoticeable” disappears, and the terminology changes from a general value term, “desired” (*iṣṭa*) which could be

¹⁷ Potter (1977:685) is somewhat reticent on the date of *Candrānanda*, noting opinions that he dates from the seventh century C.E. to much later.

applied to other categories of object, and instead a smell-specific terminology: “fragrant” (*surabhi*) is adopted.

Vaiśeṣikasūtra with commentary of Candrānanda:

rūparasagandhasparśavatī pṛthivī //

Commentary:

... *rūpaṃ śuklādi, raso madhurādi, gandhaḥ surabhīrasurabhiś ca...*

Earth possesses color, flavor, smell and touch.

Commentary:

...color is white etc., flavor is sweet etc., smell is fragrant and not-fragrant...

(*Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 2.1.1)

This binary aesthetic classification, which possibly first appears in works of this school of thought in the *Praśastapādabhāṣyam* composed by Praśastapāda¹⁸ becomes subsequently standard as can be seen in the definition of smell in the later, very popular manual of Navya (New) Nyāya, the *Bhāṣāpariccheda*:

saurabhaś cāsaurabhaś ca dvedhā parikīrtitah

It is proclaimed as twofold: fragrant and unfragrant. (*Bhāṣāpariccheda* 102.ab.)

In this examination of a trend in Indian scholarship that holds that there is a strong connection between the senses and the elements, we can see a distinct development in the classification of smells. In the passage from the *Mahābhārata* we see that the sense of smell is closely associated with the element earth, and moreover we are given a complex and detailed account of the nature of smells — an account that first notes the aesthetic aspects of smell, and also, using a variety of imported terminology, describes several other aspects of smells. Neither the *Nyāyasūtra* nor the *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* provides a classification of the qualities of objects of the senses, but their commentators do. Vātsyāyana presents an entirely aesthetic, but three-fold, classification to complement the *Nyāyasūtra*, and in the commentary of Candrānanda we see the standard smell-specific terminology (fragrant and unfragrant) of a

¹⁸ See Praśasta Devāchārya 1930:443. Potter (1977:282) notes the suggestion of Frauwallner for a date of the last half of the sixth century.

two-fold account, which later became standard in all *Vaiśeṣika* and *Nyāya* texts, and perseveres until the present day.¹⁹

Unlike the objects of the other senses, smells are from the outset aestheticized by this school of thought — they are always assigned a value. For much of the history of this school of thought, there are said to be two of these values: one good and one bad, and these are said to cover all smells. The implication is that it is impossible, for a normal person at least, to experience a smell without experiencing pleasantness or unpleasantness, and presumably also attraction and repulsion.

Jain Smells

I now turn to some Jain sources which deal with the nature of smell. I present these materials next because, as noted above, in their preoccupation with the nature of the world and of matter, they could be said to belong to Frauwallner's "nature-philosophical" category of Indian philosophy, to which the schools of thought discussed above also belong. Unlike the schools of thought discussed above, they do *not* connect the senses with the elements, yet as we shall see in the discussion of the order of the senses, the principle by which they order the senses possesses an interesting similarity to that used by the schools of thought I have discussed in the previous section. For these reasons, therefore, it is appropriate to deal with Jain sources at this point.

The first two sources are from what are believed to be the earliest Śvetāmbara Jain texts: the *Ācārāṅgasūtra* and the *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra*²⁰ dating from approximately the second or third century B.C.E. These passages do not directly discuss the nature of matter; rather in stating

¹⁹ When, in summer 2005, I mentioned that I was working on smell to Dr Bhatt of the Maharaja's Sanskrit College in Mysore, his immediate reaction was to recite the above classification from the *Bhāṣāpariccheda*.

²⁰ Paul Dundas (2002:23) notes that, "Both of these books seem to have originated around the third or second centuries B.C.E., although an earlier dating in the case of the *Ācārāṅga* and a later one in the case of the *Sūtrakṛtāṅga* cannot be ruled out, and they are generally taken as representing the most ancient stratum of Jain textual material."

what the *jīva*, the soul, is *not*, they do seem to reveal a very early definition of the nature of insentient matter.²¹

Before I go any further I will present the passages themselves. The passage in the *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, discussing the liberated soul, is as follows:

(The liberated) is not long nor small nor round nor triangular nor quadrangular nor circular; he is not black nor blue nor red nor green nor white; neither of good nor bad smell; not bitter nor pungent nor astringent nor sweet; neither rough nor soft; neither heavy nor light; neither cold nor hot; neither harsh nor smooth; he is without body, without resurrection, without contact (of matter), he is not feminine nor masculine nor neuter; he perceives, he knows, but there is no analogy (whereby to know the nature of the liberated soul); its essence is without form; there is no condition of the unconditioned. There is no sound, no colour, no smell, no taste, no touch — nothing of that kind. Thus I say.²²

In the *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra*, people who hold some sort of materialist philosophy, teaching that the soul is entirely co-extensive in space and time with the body, are said to describe what they see as a flaw in the ideas of those who believe the soul is different from the body:

Those who maintain that the soul is something different from the body, cannot tell whether the soul (as separated from the body) is long or small, whether globular or circular or triangular or square or sexagonal or octagonal or long, whether black or blue or red or yellow or white, whether of sweet smell or bad smell, whether bitter or pungent or astringent or sour or sweet, whether hard or soft or heavy or light or cold or hot or smooth or rough...²³

If we accept that these lists are indirect statements of the nature of non-living (*ajīva*) matter, then, like the *Mahābhārata* passages, they constitute a very early source for views on the nature of smell. In both the above passages the soul is described as neither fragrant nor non-

²¹ D.D. Malvania (1981:152–53) notes this also, as well as pointing out that the opposed categories of *jīva* and *ajīva* are not to be found in the *Ācārāṅgasūtra*; rather the terms *cittamanta* and *acittamanta* seem to have been in operation at this stage in Jaina thought.

²² I use Jacobi's translation in *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 22:52.

²³ Again, I use Jacobi's translation: *Sacred Books of the East*, vol. 45:340.

fragrant, using smell specific value terminology quite similar to the later, very common Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas formulation we saw above.

It is interesting to note that where previous scholarship has paid close attention to these passages, it has been with a view to establishing early Jain views on the nature of the soul (Malvania 1981; Bronkhorst 2000), and scholars have been especially concerned with a point Malvania makes, that in these passages the soul is said, amongst other things, to be “neither long nor short,” which would appear to be at odds with “...the Jain theory, found in the later texts, that the soul is the size of the body in its mundane existence, and occupies, when liberated, two thirds of the extent of the last body” (Malvania 1981:152). Bronkhorst, in discussing the possible influence of Buddhism on Jainism in forming the Jain notion of the body-sized soul, refers to Malvania’s point to show that early Jainism did not have such a notion (Bronkhorst 2000:591).

It seems that the above scholars have read this passage far too literally as a description of the soul, and instead it is more helpful to observe that, in listing a large number and variety of qualities of insentient matter, the passage has a rhetorical force to the effect that “the soul is not *in any way* like insentient matter: it is not big or small etc. etc.” I should perhaps add with respect to this point that neither of the two texts is written in an analytic style, and both deal with quite varied material: ethics, cosmology, and so on. Therefore, it is not a good idea to read too much into the fine details of exactly what this negative definition implies about the soul — the contrast is between soul and insentient matter in general, and we should not take this detail about the length or shortness of the soul too literally.

With regard to Malvania’s problem of the shape of the soul, even though a body-sized soul does have a shape and size, nevertheless, during one lifetime, and from one life to the next, this body-related size and shape will change: I only need to raise my arm to change the shape of my body-sized soul, and if one wishes to give a definition of the essential nature of the soul, these contingent size-modifications should play no part in it. That the liberated soul described has a size which does not again change is equally contingent on the size of the last body of that soul, and, of course, any one particular size and shape is not part of the nature of all souls.

Therefore, it is quite justifiable to say that, rather than reading these passages with a view to extracting a negative definition of the soul in early Jainism, one should instead consider, as I do, that they provide an early statement, indirect, and in a rhetorical context, of the nature of matter that is not sentient/not soul — specifically that material part of the non-sentient/non-soul substance which later becomes known as *pudgala/poggala*.

The second passage, from the *Sūtrakṛtāṅgasūtra*, is particularly interesting as this list is presented as part of a disproof of another philosophy: these numerous qualities are mentioned incidentally as part of the rhetoric of a non-Jain teacher. Yet ironically, though these words are in the mouth of a non-Jain, they show several distinctive Jain features such as the typical Jain order of the senses, which I will discuss below, and the absence of the taste “salty” which remains a typical Jain feature. Thus in describing an opponent of Jainism, the Jain writers nevertheless present him with several uniquely Jain features. In this way the passage raises a very important point, to which I will return later in the article — that in the context of a debate on a certain contested topic, other parts of a system, which are not especially contested, are nevertheless laid open to public scrutiny. Should these background, minor aspects of the system, such as the nature of smell for example, be noticeably different, they are likely to be challenged. In that case, one either requires a good defense of this part of the system to hand, or, in order to save oneself the effort of justifying this part of the system, one might do well to adopt a less contentious account for such a less important part of the system.

Not only is the definition of smell in this passage typically Jain, but so is the given *order* of the objects of the senses: visible form, smell, taste, touch.²⁴ This typically Jain-ordered list of sense-object qualities is at odds with the orders generally given by Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and

²⁴ Sound is omitted. The question of sound in Jaina philosophy is interesting, and it appears to be an entirely neglected topic. In the order of the senses, it would go first, or indeed last, as the same order is presented in both directions, i.e. ABCDE and EDCBA — indeed it is because of this flexibility in the direction of the order of the senses in these discussions that I decided not to talk of a “hierarchy” of the senses — it is more the internal relations of the order of the senses that matters.

Buddhists, as I will discuss below. In this rhetorical context, admittedly entirely fictional, and composed by a Jain opponent of the view expounded, we can nevertheless begin to imagine how the very ordering of this list of the sense qualities, an issue entirely incidental to the topic in hand, might have come to jar the ears of a Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, or Buddhist opponent. The orders of the senses not only reflect the primary classificatory principles of these schools, but would also have constituted a small, in-passing, sectarian dig-in-the-ribs in any actual debate context. Indeed, as I will discuss below, the classificatory principle behind the order of the senses for the Jains is the classification of beings according to the number of senses they possess, itself part of the wider Jain description of the universe and its contents. Thus the Jain order of the senses hints at the rest of the scheme, as do the distinctive orders of the senses and their objects as used by Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and Buddhists. It is indeed notable that the Jains give the same order of elements as the Vaiśeṣikas, and have a similar range-of-senses theory to the Buddhists,²⁵ yet still choose to order the senses hierarchically according to their occurrence in sentient beings. But we will return to this topic later.

In Umāsvatī's fourth or fifth century C.E.²⁶ Sanskrit systemization of Jain doctrine, the *Tattvārthasūtra*, we find a more explicit statement on the qualities of matter (*pudgala*). This definition is in turn expanded by the sixth century C.E.²⁷ Digambara commentator, Pūjyapāda, and here we again find many of the same qualities of matter that were denied of the soul in the earlier passages.

sparsārasagandhavarnāvantah pudgalāḥ

Commentary:

spṛśyate sparsānamātram vā sparsaḥ. so'ṣṭavidhaḥ; mṛdukāṭhinagurulaghuṣṭoṣnasnigdharūksabhedāt. rasyate rasanamātram vā rasaḥ. sa pañcavidhaḥ; tiktāmlakaṭumadhurakaṣāyabhedāt. gandhyate gandhamātram vā gandhaḥ. sa dvedhā; surabhīr asurabhīr iti. varṇyate varṇamātram vā varṇaḥ. sa pañcavidhaḥ; kṛṣṇanīlapītaśukla-

²⁵ “The range (*visaya*) is largest with vision where it goes beyond 100, 000 *joy*; with hearing it goes up to 12, and with all the other senses up to 9 *joy*” (Schubring 2000:147).

²⁶ Dundas 2002:86.

²⁷ Dundas 2002:87.

lobitabhedāt. ta ete mūlabhedāḥ pratyekaṃ saṃkhyeyāsaṃkhyeyānantabhedās ca bhavanti...

pudgalas (matter) possess touch, taste, smell, color.

Sarvārthasiddhi Commentary:

Touch is (that which is) touched or merely (the act of) touching. It is eight-fold because of division into soft, hard, heavy, light, cold, hot, smooth, rough. Taste is (that which is) tasted or merely (the act of) tasting. It is five-fold because of the division into bitter, sour, pungent, sweet, astringent. Smell is (that which is) smelled, or merely (the act of) smelling. It is two-fold: fragrant and not-fragrant. Color is visually perceived or merely (the act of) visual perception. It is five-fold because of the division into black, dark blue, yellow, white, red. These here are the root-divisions, and each becomes numerable, innumerable and infinite divisions... (*Tattvārthasūtra* 5.23)

Though not identical, the qualities²⁸ listed are in many respects similar to those in the earlier, indirect definitions of matter. Notably the taste “salty” is absent in both; this remains a distinctive feature of Jain philosophical descriptions of the nature of taste. Also, the nature of smell does not change: for Pūjyapāda this remains two-fold, yet there is a small change in terminology, from the “fragrant smell” (*surabhi-gandhe*) and “bad-smelling smell,” (*durabhi-gandhe*) of the *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, to simply “fragrant” and “unfragrant” (*surabhir asurabhir*). The bad smells are now defined as negations of the good ones, as is also the case for the Vaiśeṣikas. Pūjyapāda also makes very clear that these are only the most simple “divisions” and they go on to produce infinite variations.²⁹

It would seem that this formulation essentially reproduces the definition of smell in the *Ācārāṅgasūtra*, which appears to be an earlier statement that smell is simply fragrant and non-fragrant than is found in any of the extant Hindu or Buddhist sources. From the start, the Jains are only interested in defining smell in opposing aesthetic terms, and they state that smell has only two values. This is particularly important as it really seems as if they came to this conclusion before the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Buddhist schools of thought, who may in this

²⁸ I use the term “quality” here not as a translation of the Sanskrit term *guṇa*, but in a general English sense of the word.

²⁹ The terms numerable, innumerable and infinite refer to the Jain classification of numbers. For a clear basic treatment of this matter, see Tatia’s Appendix One in Umāsvāti, *That Which Is*, 265–70.

case, have even borrowed this definition from the Jains.³⁰ It would be especially interesting to pursue this line of enquiry with regard to the other sense objects, but unfortunately that lies beyond the scope of this article.

The Jain classification of smell, unlike that of the Nyāya Vaiśeṣikas, and that of the Buddhists discussed below, does not appear to have changed over time. From the very start it would seem the Jains had a simple two-fold aesthetic classification of smells, something that was only very common in other schools of thought by the first few centuries C.E. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether the Jain account of smell influenced that of other schools or not; certainly their “salt-less” account of taste did not catch on elsewhere. In discussing the sense of smell with Jain scholars in India today,³¹ what appears to strike them as most significant is not the classification of odors, but rather the fact that smell is only possessed by beings that have *three senses* or more; that the sense of smell therefore falls in the middle of the order of senses. Indeed it was in discussing this matter with these scholars that I was first struck by the importance of the very order of the senses as a reflection of the wider Jain world view. I return to this subject at the end of the article.

Buddhist Smells

Finally I turn to some Buddhist analyses of the nature of smell. As we will see below, the principles according to which the Buddhists order the senses are quite different to those of the preceding two schools of thought. Not only do the Buddhist sources differ in this respect, but they also contain a greater diversity of actual classifications of odor than we have seen so far. In general, the history of the Buddhist classification of smells, and of the senses, is the most complex, and therefore I have left my discussion of them to last. As above, I deal with my sources chronologically as far as is possible.

³⁰ This is, of course, contingent on the dating of the early Jain texts.

³¹ Bhaṭṭāraka Cārukīrti Swami Jī, the Bhaṭṭāraka of Śṛavanabelagola, and Dr Shubhachandra of the Department of Jainology and Prakrit, Mysore University. Personal communications, July and August 2005.

Although there may be some uncertainty about the classificatory principle behind the order of the senses, nevertheless the Buddhist analyses of the senses do tend to share the same distinct sense order, this being common, for example, to both Pāli *Theravāda* texts and the Sanskrit *Abhidharmakośa*. Also, the earlier Buddhist discussions of smell, in addition to mentioning two or three aesthetic properties (fragrant, and so forth), also define smell in terms of its source, and this is predominantly, but not exclusively, expressed in terms of the parts of plants.

I begin with a passage on smell from the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi*, an early text presenting an analysis of the world. This text dates from before the common era³² and forms the first part of the Pali *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. Here, in the section on form (*rūpakaṇḍa*) the form of the sphere of odor³³ is presented. Though ultimately the ontological status of smells, matter, and so forth may differ from that in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, nevertheless, this passage, in enumerating the components of the objects of the senses, shares much with the other analyses I discuss, in that it classifies odors in a technical philosophical context:

Kataman taṃ rūpaṃ gandhāyatanam? Yo gandho catunnaṃ mahābhūtānaṃ upādāya anidassano sappatigho mūlagandho sārāgandho, tacagandho, pattagandho, puppha-gandho, phalagandho, āmagandho, viśāgandho, sugandho yo vā pana-ñño pi atthi gandho catunnaṃ mahābhūtānaṃ upādāya...

What is the form that is the sphere of smell? That smell, which, derived from the four great elements, with no attribute, producing a reaction, flower-smell, heartwood-smell,³⁴ bark-smell, leaf-smell, flower-smell, fruit-smell, raw-meat-smell, putrid-smell, good-smell, bad-smell or whatever other smell, derived from the four great elements... (*Dhammasaṅgaṇi* 141.625)³⁵

Quite unlike the analyses of smell examined above, this list is dominated by smells of classes of particular objects, and especially the smells of parts of plants. There are the smells of roots, heart-woods, barks,

³² Potter (1996:137) notes the varied opinions on this matter, which range from 386 B.C.E. to the second century B.C.E.

³³ *gandhāyatanam*, as opposed to smelling —function: *ghāṇāyatanam*.

³⁴ Note, for example, that it is only the heartwood of the sandalwood tree that is fragrant.

³⁵ I quote only the beginning of this very repetitive section.

leaves, flowers, and fruits. The next two smells are more challenging. I was at first tempted to interpret *āma* as implying “raw and rotten,” yet I think this may miss the point, for whereas many non-vegetarian Europeans and North Americans do not think of the smell of raw meat as particularly unpleasant, or even particularly noticeable, and indeed the concept “raw,” applied to food, including steak tartare, sushi, and crudités, is in general perceived to be relatively appealing, on the contrary in ancient India, not only did raw meat no doubt have a less deodorized, sterile presentation, but also the smell of it may well have been thought to be particularly unpleasant. In the Pali *Suttanipāta*, there is indeed a text known as the *Āmagandhasutta*³⁶ in which raw-flesh smell (*āmagandha*) is equated with a variety of bad deeds.

Putrid smell (*vissagandha*) is another notable term. The Pali Text Society Dictionary notes that it is cognate with Sanskrit *visra* and gives the meaning “a smell like raw flesh.”³⁷ Monier Williams’ Sanskrit dictionary gives for *visra*: “musty, smelling of raw meat.”³⁸ According to Buddhaghosa’s explanation, discussed below, it would appear that whereas *āmagandha* refers to raw meat and vermin, this smell implies fetid pungent smells such as rotten fish and meat. Nevertheless, the exact distinction between these terms is not clear.

Finally there is a somewhat familiar looking pair: “good smell” and “bad smell.” They are mentioned last of all and, unlike the other smells, they are general/abstract categories. Apart from these final two terms, this account of smell does not focus on classifying smell in an abstract manner, and instead concentrates on describing smell by means of concrete examples, prototypical cases rather than abstract laws. The list notably makes no claim to be complete, and mentions “whatever other smells.”

In Buddhaghosa’s fifth century commentary on this very passage we can see a familiar development in the Theravāda Buddhist analysis of smells. Having glossed the various examples of smell, he goes on to say that in fact all smells are covered by the terms “good smell” (*sugandho*)

³⁶ *Suttanipāta* 239–52 (ed. Fausbøll, 42–44). I thank Ryan Overbey for drawing my attention to this *sutta*.

³⁷ *Pali–English Dictionary*, s.v. *Vissa*.

³⁸ *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. *Visra*.

and “bad smell” (*duggandho*), which he glosses as “desired” and “undesired” smell respectively. Leaving behind the uniquely Buddhist classification of smells according to examples, by cases as opposed to abstract categories, Buddhaghosa aligns the classification of smell with those by now found both in Hindu and Jain traditions in India. It is both a move away from explanation in terms of cases, and towards conformity with the wider intellectual world on this relatively small point, regarding which the Theravāda texts had previously taken a radically different and peculiar line. Note also Buddhaghosa’s explanations of the terms *āmagandha* and *vissagandha*, terms which were clearly in need of explanation:

Gandhāyatananiddese mūlagandho ti. Yaṃ kiñci mūlaṃ paṭicca nibbatto gandho sārāgandhādisu pi ca es’ eva nayo. Asiddhadussiddhānaṃ ūkādināṃ gandho āmagandho, macchasakalikapūtimaṃsaṅkiliṭṭhasappiādināṃ gandho vissagandho. Sugandho ti iṭṭhagandho, duggandho ti anīṭṭhagandho. Iminā padadvayena sabbo pi gandho pariyādiṇṇo. . . .

In the descriptive exposition of the smell-function: “root smell” (means) a smell existing on account of whatever root. It is this same sense in the case of “heart-wood-smell” etc. “Raw-meat smell” is the smell of the uncooked or badly cooked, of lice etc. “Putrid smell” is the smell of bits of fish, putrid meat, foul ghee etc. “Fragrant” (means) desired smell, “bad-smelling” (means) undesired smell. All smell is exhausted by this pair of words. . . . (*Arthasālinī* on *Dhammasaṅgāṇi* 141.625)

I now turn to the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu, a compilation of doctrine also composed in the fifth century C.E. This text presents an interesting and complex case, giving two different definitions of smell, and provides a unique window into the active debate on the nature of smells. The primary definition in the *sūtra* is that smell is four-fold; an account of smell we have not so far encountered in this study, yet which is not unknown in other Buddhist texts:³⁹

³⁹ This fourfold definition occurs in other Buddhist sources. It is found in the intriguing, and apparently rather overlooked, *Dharmasaṃgraha*, attributed to Nāgārjuna, 2nd century C.E. Here the text explains:

catvāro gandhāḥ. tadyathā. Sugandho durgandhaḥ samagandho viṣamagandhaś ceti

There are four smells. They are as follows: good-smell, bad-smell, even-smell and uneven-smell. (*Dharmasaṃgraha* 37 [ed. Muller and Wenzel, 8])

1.10 *caturvidho gandhaḥ*

sugandhadurgandhayoḥ samaviṣamagandhatvāt. trividhas tu śāstre. sugandho durgandhaḥ samagandha iti.

1.10 Smell is four-fold.

Auto-commentary: Because of the evenness and unevenness of the smell of good smell and bad smell. But in one technical treatise it is three-fold: “good smell, bad smell, even smell.” (*Abhidharmakośa* 1.10)

Vasubandhu explains in his auto-commentary, that the four-fold nature of smell is due to the “even-and-uneven smell” of good and bad smell. According to his own explanation, “even” (*sama*) and “uneven smell” (*viṣamagandha*) are really two subclasses of both good and bad smell. Thus he ultimately reduces the four-fold definition to a two-fold aesthetic definition of smell. What “even” and “uneven” may mean in this context is quite another matter, one that I have not entirely been able to resolve, but before I turn to this I should mention the second definition Vasubandhu gives in his auto-commentary. Having discussed the four-fold definition of the *sūtra*, he says that in one technical treatise (*śāstra*) it is said to be three-fold: “good smell,” “bad smell” and “even smell.”⁴⁰

Note also that the ninth century Sanskrit-Tibetan Encyclopedia, the *Mahāvīyutpatti*, also gives the same four types of smell: Csoma de Körös 1910:106.

⁴⁰ In his translation of the *Abhidharmakośa*, La Vallée Poussin notes that this “*śāstra*” from which the three-fold definition comes, is in fact the *Prakaraṇa* of Vasumitra, which may date from the second to fourth centuries C.E. (Vallée Poussin 1971, vol. 1:18). This text of the Sarvāstivāda school, also known as *Prakaraṇagrantha* and the *Prakaraṇapādaśāstra*, now survives only in Chinese. Frauwallner (1995:32) notes that it is a compilation, somewhat unsystematic of “the most important achievements that had been made up to his (Vasumitra’s) time.”

In his commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa*, Yaśomitra also mentions this text, presumably as one of the sources of Vasubandhu’s great compilation.

The same three-fold definition also appears in the *Dharmaskandha*, another Sarvāstivāda text, which Frauwallner (1995:14) believes to be earlier than the *Prakaraṇa*. Indeed Frauwallner believes this text, which has similarities to the Pali *Vibhaṅga*, to be particularly early, deriving from a common source shared with the Pali *Vibhaṅga* (ibid. 20). Greiner and Potter believe it to be the “earliest of the seven canonical Abhidharma works of the Sarvāstivādins” (Potter 1996:179), and suggest it was composed around 300 B.C.E. As with the *Prakaraṇa*, the complete *Dharmaskandha* is now only extant in Chinese, and it does indeed contain our three-fold definition of

What, then, are we to make of this “even smell”? The only other three-fold definition of smell we have seen so far is that of Vātsyāyana — “desired smell,” “undesired smell,” and “disregardable smell.” Given that *sama* means “even, equal,” it seems not unreasonable in the context of this three-fold division to assume that *samagandha* here means a “neutral smell” balanced between the two value-poles of good and bad smell. Yet if the term *sama* in the context of the classification of smells means “of neutral aesthetic value,” presumably *viṣama* means “not of neutral aesthetic value.” But if we interpret the term in this sense, Vasubandhu will run into problems explaining the use of these terms in his four-fold definition of smell. To suggest, as he does, that these are subcategories of both good and bad smells would be contradictory or redundant — a good smell that is also a neutral smell is not possible, and to say that a good smell is “not devoid of aesthetic value” is redundant.

How might an interpreter of Vasubandhu avoid these difficulties? The answer is by a rather creative reading of his terminology. When discussing the case of Vātsyāyana’s three-fold definition of smell, I noted that his term “disregardable,” (*upekṣanīya*), could be understood as both “neutral” and “unnoticeable.” If one were likewise to interpret the third value, “even smell,” in Vasubandhu’s three-fold definition of smell to mean “disregardable” in the sense of “unnoticeable,” then its opposite, *viṣama* may well be taken to mean “very noticeable,” rendered perhaps into English by “faint” and “strong.” In this reading the two terms *sama*

smell, yet this is embedded in a familiar looking, somewhat more extensive description, kindly translated by my colleague Ryan Overbey:

Root-smell, stalk-smell, branch-smell, leaf-smell, flower-smell, fruit-smell, good-smell, bad-smell, neutral-smell. (T1537.500b12–13)

Thus it would seem that, as in the Pāli textual tradition, the earliest discussions of the nature of smell in the Sarvāstivāda tradition gave a list of examples of smell-sources followed by more general categories; the list of smell-sources being dropped in later accounts in favor of the more general categories. As noted above, Buddhaghosa in his commentary likewise points out that the general categories are sufficient to cover all smells.

and *viṣama* in the four-fold definition would make perfect sense as viable and non-redundant subcategories of good and bad smell.

I believe that the line of reasoning I outline above is precisely what leads Yaśomitra to gloss “even smell” as “faint” (*anutkaṭa*) in his commentary on Vasubandhu:

sugandhadurgandhayor samaviśamatvād iti. anutkaṭotkaṭagandhatvād ity arthaḥ. asmin pakṣe dvividho gandha iṣṭaḥ. trividhas tu śāstra iti. samagandho ‘nyas tṛtiya ity arthaḥ. apare punar vyācakṣate ‘samagandha iti tayor evaikaśeṣa’ iti. sa evārtho bhavati śabdāmātram tu bhidyate

“Because of the evenness and unevenness of both good smell and bad smell.” This means: because of faint and strong smell. By this account, you opt for a two-fold smell. “But in one *śāstra* is it three-fold.” This means that the extra third one is even smell. However, others explain that “‘even smell’ is just part of both of them.” That alone is the meaning, but the word itself is split. (Commentary of Yaśomitra on *Abhidharmakośa* 1.10)

Thus Yaśomitra explains that these terms “even” and “uneven” refer to low perceptibility (or low intensity), and high perceptibility (or high intensity) respectively. As he observes, this effectively creates a two-fold definition of smell, well-known from elsewhere. He then discusses the threefold definition, noting first that in this definition the third type of smell is “even-smell.” But then he adds that some others — who no doubt interpret the term not to mean “neutral,” but rather “faint” in the manner he just glossed — believe that this third term actually applies to both good and bad smells. These people seem to be saying that *sama*, understood as “faint,” is therefore a part of/belongs to both good and bad smell. Reading the term *sama* as “faint,” and therefore as a subcategory of both good smell and bad smell (and splitting the application of the word in the process), allows this school of thought to produce yet another essentially two-fold definition of smell from a three-fold one. Such, it would appear, was the drive to have a two-fold definition of smell. This is despite the fact that “faint” seems to be an extremely strained reading of the word *sama* (even) in the context of the three-fold definition. Indeed, if one were to consider the three-fold definition alone with no commentary, it would seem quite sensible to take *sama* in this context as meaning “neutral, even, equal” — a smell-value between good and bad smells.

As we can see, two forces seem at work here in the Buddhist definitions: a drive for internal systematic coherency, revealed in Yaśomitra's consistent interpretation of the term "even" (*sama*) in the three-fold definition, and secondly a drive for external inter-sectarian uniformity — both uniformity in the *type* of category used for definition (thus removing the definition by example, i.e. "root-smell"), and also uniformity of the actual definition of smell (two-fold).

The earliest Buddhist definition of smell we considered included aesthetic categories, but was dominated by the sources of smells, especially by plants, the smells of which are far more numerous than the (bad) smells of animals and animal products. This proliferation of (generally good) plant smells, as opposed to a far more limited number of (often bad) animal smells, is something we often see as a feature of Sanskrit religious literature. But, by the early centuries C.E., the Buddhists have "cleaned up" this complex account, and thenceforth they propound definitions which consist only of general aesthetic categories, yet, unlike the other schools of thought we have examined, they failed to agree on just one account. Presumably, a more complex aesthetic classification of smells would permit a more complex variety of affective responses to them.

The Orders of the Senses

I now turn to the question of the place of the sense of smell in the given lists of the senses, and the order of the senses in general. The given order of the senses/sense objects is quite significant, as it would appear to reveal one factor to which a school of thought attributes importance as a classificatory principle. As mentioned above in a note on the Jain order of the senses, I have deliberately chosen the term "order" as opposed to hierarchy for two reasons: firstly, the orders of the senses are at times reversed in some contexts, whilst still maintaining the internal relations between the listed senses (i.e. ABCDE, EDCBA), and furthermore, the senses are not here necessarily being assessed as progressively superior to each other in a general manner, rather they differ only according to one chosen principle.

For the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas the order of the senses (smell, taste, sight, touch, hearing⁴¹) is aligned with the given order of the substrata of the

⁴¹ In discussing the order of the senses I have omitted to discuss the sixth sense

objects of the senses: the order of the elements. For the Jains, it is based on a hierarchy of types of being ordered according to the number of senses they have,⁴² and it is not perfectly clear exactly what the Buddhist order (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch) is based on, though it may well be based on the spatio-temporal relation between the perceiver and perceived. Thus the order of the senses indicates sectarian affiliation, and also suggests important early theoretical concerns: for the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, matter and qualities; for the Jains, the hierarchical structure of the contents of the universe, and for the Buddhists, the phenomenological explanation of the world.

As mentioned above, for the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, the order of the senses is ordered according to the elements, which for them were ordered according to their sensory “richness,” i.e. according to the number of potential sense objects a given element contains. I will return to this point later. The Jains, on the other hand, use a cosmological-hierarchical principle in this context. For the Jains, the principle of classification is based on that part of their cosmology that describes the hierarchical classes of living beings. This is quite apt as the Jains are well known to have excelled in the field of cosmology, and also this classification reflects a concern with the sense experiences of all beings, the understanding of which is necessary if one is to be fully non-violent.

These two classifications nevertheless share one striking similarity — for both the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and the Jains, the senses are ordered according to the sensory “richness” of their respective concerns: sensed *object*, and sensing *subject* respectively. The Nyāya Vaiśeṣikas order the senses according to how many types of sense data are found in the *object* perceived, thus smell is a special quality of earth, the most sense-rich of elements. The other elements are ordered according to a decrease in sensory potential: water has no smell, but you may taste, see, touch and hear it; fire can be seen, touched and heard, but not tasted or smelled; wind may be touched and heard, and finally the element I translate as “space” (*ākāśa*) is only associated with sound. The Jains order the senses

described by South Asian philosophy: the mental organ (*manas*). This is an enormous topic in its own right, but more importantly it is generally listed and discussed somewhat apart from the other senses.

⁴² Thus: one-sensed beings possess touch, two-sensed beings possess touch and taste, three-sensed beings possess touch, taste, and smell, and so on for sight and hearing.

according to how many types of sense-perception are found in the *subject* perceiving, thus hearing is found only in five-sensed beings, and so on down to plants, earth-beings, and fire-beings, who only have the sense of touch. The Nyāya Vaiśeṣika classification is object-centered, and the Jain classification subject-centered. The above does not apply to any of the possible Buddhist classificatory principles discussed below.

For the Buddhists, the classificatory principle is most probably based on an analysis of the nature of perception, on the theory of perception, which may indeed reflect a central concern with the nature of experience. Yet, there was clearly some uncertainty about the classificatory principle of the senses, and this uncertainty led the Buddhists to produce the most explicit discussions of this issue we have seen so far. In the *Abhidharmakośa*, Vasubandhu gives two possible explanations of the given order of the senses, which shows that this very order was itself an area of interest. His first explanation is that the senses are ordered according to the distance, and rapidity of their operation:

dūrāsutaravṛtṭyā 'nyat... 23 c

cakṣuḥ śrotraṃ hi dūraṇiṣayam, tat pūrvam uktam dvayāt. tayoṛ api cakṣuḥ dūratāre vṛtṭiḥ, paśyato 'pi dūrān nadīm tac cchabdāśravaṇāt, atas tat pūrvam uktam. ghrāṇasya tu nāsti dūre vṛtṭiḥ, jihvāyās ca tayoṛ āsutaravṛtṭitvāt ghrāṇam pūrvam uktam; aprāptasyaiva jihvām bhojasya gandhagrahaṇāt.

The rest are according to greater distance or speed of action...

The eye and hearing have a distant field, so are mentioned before the (next) two. And of those two, the operation of the eye is at a greater distance: though you can see a river from a distance, you cannot hear it. Thus that one is mentioned first. There is no operation at a distance of the sense of smell, nor of the tongue. Because of a more rapid operation, the sense of smell is mentioned the first of the two — because you can perceive the smell of food that has not yet reached the tongue. (*Abhidharmakośa* 1.23 c with autocommentary)

Following this, Vasubandhu discusses another explanation — that the senses are ordered according to the position of the sense-organs on the body, starting from the top down:

yathāsthānam kramo 'tha vā // 23 d

atha vā asmin śarīre cakṣuḥ 'dhiṣṭhānam upariṣṭāt niviṣṭam tasmād adhaḥ śrotrasya tasmād adho ghrāṇasya tasmāt jihvāyāḥ tasyāḥ kāyasya bāhulyena...

Or else the sequence is according to their position

Or else: in this body the site of sight is located uppermost, below that (the site) of hearing, below that (the site of) of smell, (below) that (the site) of taste, for the most part (below) that (the site) of the body (i.e. the organ of touch)... (*Abhidharmakośa* 1.23 d with autocommentary)

In the twelfth century Sri Lankan⁴³ Pali *Abhidhammatthavibhāvinī* of Sumangala, a commentary on the *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, we encounter this discussion again, and here it seems that the later Theravāda school held that the order of the senses is based on the nature of their operation, not on their position on the body:⁴⁴

The *eye-sphere* is that which is the eye and also a sphere, and similarly with the rest. Herein, of the internal spheres, the eye-sphere is clear since it has objects that have appearance and are resistant, and so is stated first. It is followed by the other spheres, which have objects that are invisible and resistant. Of these, because in common with the eye-sphere it has objects that are not [actually] reached, the *ear-sphere* is stated next.

Of the rest, since it has the ability to take its object quickly, the *nose-sphere* is stated first — for the smell of food etc., that is merely placed in front [of one] strikes the nose consequent on the air. (Wijeratne and Gethin 2002:278)

Although there was some confusion as to the reason for the order of the senses in Buddhism, given that two of these passages explain that the order of the senses is based on their spatio-temporal relations to their

⁴³ Wijeratne and Gethin 2002:12.

⁴⁴ I am grateful to Ven. Piyobhaso Bhatsakorn of Mahachulalongkorn University, Bangkok, for drawing my attention to this passage (e-mail message to author, 23 January 2006). The Ven. Bhatsakorn also pointed me to another text belonging to the philosophical *Abhidhamma* literature in Pāli, the *Kathāvatthu*, where, during a discussion of the development of the embryo, it appears that the order of the development of the senses corresponds to the Buddhist order of the senses. Although this is quite notable, this passage is about the development of the sense organs in the embryo, and not in any way an explicit attempt by Buddhist scholars to address the question of the principle behind the given order of the senses. Nevertheless, this provides a third possible explanation of why the senses might be given in this order by the Buddhists, though this explanation may be circular, and the Buddhists could have believed they developed in this order precisely because this is the order in which they were generally listed. This point also draws our attention to possible connections with medical theory, something which I shall consider below. See *Kathāvatthu* 14.2.

objects, it may well be that this is the original rationale⁴⁵ — especially as it is consistent with/reflects another Buddhist classification of the senses in terms of being contact-senses or non-contact senses.⁴⁶

The position of smelling and smells in these orders is also significant. In Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thought it is at the extreme, generally number one, and this reflects that it is the defining characteristic of the element earth, the most “coarse,” the most laden with potential sense data. To sense a smell, according to this system, one requires an earth-containing body, and one needs to inhabit a world where there are earthy things to smell, something that is not inevitable in this system. Indeed, beings that find themselves in this predicament are fortunate, or perhaps unfortunate, in that their bodies and world enable them to experience all five senses and sense objects; the opportunities for sensual temptation and karmic retribution are the most varied for beings who are able to smell. According to this account, whereas in the case of *elements* smell characterizes earth, for *sentient beings* the sense of smell could be said to characterize those beings that have the richest world of the senses — a world of experience that, like the objects of the sense of smell itself, can be both good and bad.⁴⁷ Yet, where the beings who experience smell have the greatest potential for varieties of sense-experience, smells themselves are the most restricted sense objects, in that smells are limited to occurring in earth alone. Smell therefore has the smallest scope of substratum. In this smell is quite the opposite of sound which has all-pervading space, sometimes translated as “ether,” (*ākāśa*) as its substratum.

For the Jains, the sense of smell falls in the center, indicating a certain level of advancement in the karmic universe, but only half of what

⁴⁵ In this respect, the Buddhist order of the senses would appear to have most in common with perhaps the most influential order of the senses in Western scholarship: the Aristotelian order of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Jütte 2005:54–71 provides a short clear introduction to the history of the order of the senses in European thought.

⁴⁶ See footnote 49 below for some discussion of this matter.

⁴⁷ Note that the Jains, who do actually order the senses by the sensory capacities of beings, have hearing as characteristic of beings with the greatest potential to sense the world.

can be achieved. According to this view, it is nothing special, relatively primitive, yet there are still many types of being, including all plants, who are not able to smell. It also reflects the Jains' detailed interest in, and concern about the perceptions, experiences, and natures of beings other than humans.⁴⁸

In the Buddhist classification, smell also falls dead-center, yet for entirely different reasons. This sense is not really long-ranging like sight and hearing, yet it does permit a certain amount of remote experience of the world, especially compared to taste. Yet as smell comes to you via wind, it is unlike sight, which can range at will. Like touch, it does allow actual contact with objects,⁴⁹ not the source-objects themselves, but rather particles of them. It is exactly this ambiguity of smell, caught mid-way between sight and touch, which allows smell to furnish, at certain times, in certain conditions, similar cognitive spatial information to that furnished by vision.⁵⁰ This also allows odorants in one place to release their smell to a perceiver in another place, and perhaps consequently to attract or repel that perceiver.

⁴⁸ For the details of the various types of being possessed of various senses presented in the order of one-sensed beings onwards, see Tatia's accessible translation of the *Tattvārthasūtra* (Umāsvāti, *That Which Is*, 41–46).

⁴⁹ The question of exactly how contact occurs between senses and their objects was considered of great importance, though unfortunately I cannot explore this issue fully in this article. In the Buddhist *Abhidharmakośa*, Vasubandhu provides a classification of the senses in terms of whether or not they contact their objects, and this classification is consistent with the given order of the senses, since sight and hearing are not contact senses (*aprāptaviṣayam* “whose fields of operation are not contacted”), but smell, taste and touch are senses of contact (*prāptaviṣayam* “whose fields of operation are contacted”). See Vasubandhu *Abhidharmakośa* 1.43 and commentary for a complex discussion of this issue. With regard to other schools of thought, see Karin Preisendanz's scholarly article on theory of vision (1989), where she, in the course of discussing Nyāya/Vaiśeṣika theory of vision in particular, also discusses the complexities of sense and sense-object contact more generally.

⁵⁰ Indian poets seem to have delighted in creating conceits exploiting this ambiguous aspect of the sense of smell. For example, in the play *Ratnāvalī* by King Harṣa, in one famous passage the character of the king charmingly sniffs his way around the royal pleasure garden in the dark:

*pālīyaṃ campakānāṃ niyatam ayam asau sundarahḥ sinduvārahḥ
sāndrā vīthī tatheyāṃ bakulaviṭapināṃ pātālāpañktir eṣā /*

Smell and the Senses in Āyurvedic Texts

Now, having considered the fundamental analysis of odors, and also the order of the senses in these three traditions, before we turn to the conclusion, this is a good moment to note the significance of the senses in Indian traditional medicine, *Āyurveda*. The *Āyurvedic* literature is vast, and so we must limit ourselves here to a brief examination of smell and the senses in one important and foundational medical text known as the *Carakasamhitā*.⁵¹ In the “Sense Section,” *Indriyasthānam*, the fifth division of the *Carakasamhitā*⁵² there is a passage of particular interest to us,⁵³ in which the olfactory characteristics of a terminal decline in health are described; the person whose imminent death may be ascertained in this manner is known by the uncanny term “bloomed/flowered” *puṣpita*:

*nānāpuṣpopamo gandho yasya bhāti divānīśam
puṣpitasya vanasyeva nānādrumalatāvataḥ
tam ābuhḥ puṣpitaṁ dhīrā naraṁ maraṇalakṣaṇaiḥ
sa nā samvatsarād dehaṁ jahātīti viniścayaḥ
evam ekaikaśaḥ puṣpair yasya gandhaḥ samo bhavet
iṣṭair vā yadi vāniṣṭaiḥ sa ca puṣpita ucyate*

*āghrāyāghrāya gandhaṁ vividhaṁ adhigataiḥ pādapair evaṁ asmin
vyaktiṁ pānthāḥ prayāti dviguṇataratamonihnuto 'py eṣa cibhaiḥ //*

This is surely the border of *campakas*; this is that beautiful *sinduvāra*, and this is the dense hedge of *bakula* trees; this is the row of *pāṭalas*,

The path in this place, though concealed by double-darkness, becomes clear by means of the signs of the trees recognized by constant sniffing. (Harṣa-Deva, *Ratnāvalī*, Act 3, ed. Kale, 68–69; my translation)

Another such conceit, this time humorous, is found in the first act of the *Mṛcchakaṭika* of Śūdraka (ed. Kale 40–41).

⁵¹ As Wujastyk (2003:3) notes, this “is the text with which classical medicine in India really begins.”

⁵² Wujastyk provides a good discussion of the complexities surrounding the date of this text, the earliest version of which possibly dates from the third or second centuries B.C.E., and was last revised by Dṛḍhabala in the fourth or fifth century C.E. (ibid. 4).

⁵³ I am grateful to Karin Preisendanz for kindly making me aware of this passage (e-mail to the author, December 28, 2005).

He who, day and night, gives off a smell like various flowers, like that of a forest of various trees and creepers in bloom,
 The wise call that man bloomed with the marks of dying, it is certain that that man will leave his body after a year,
 And he whose smell thus becomes the same as flowers, individually, whether they are desirable or undesirable, is said to be bloomed...⁵⁴ (*Carakasamhitā*, *Indriyasthānam* 2.8–10, ed. Priyavat Sharma; my translation)

Some of the content of this passage, as well as the context of the passage in the *Indriyasthānam* of the *Carakasamhitā* is of special significance in the light of the previous discussion.

First we should note the explicit role the sense of smell plays in medicine. Not only does the doctor use all his senses, but also the functioning of all the senses of the patient is to be taken into account in diagnosing a terminal condition.

We can also note that here, as in the passage from the *Mahābhārata* we shall re-examine in a moment, the two-fold classification of smells: desirable and undesirable, or fragrant and non-fragrant, and so forth, does not remain limited only to scholastic discussion of the fundamental characteristics of the world. We are told in the above passage that the person who possesses the smell of flowers, whether these flowers smell desirable or undesirable, is “bloomed” and therefore doomed to die soon. Were it not for our analysis of the classification of smells above this would have seemed like a quite unremarkable comment about the flowers, especially as the classification of smells is so basic, and the terms desirable and undesirable would not necessarily strike the reader as a reference to a specific and technical classification system. Furthermore, the implication of giving both of the two types of smell in this passage is that *all smells* of flowers are thereby included.

As we have seen, not only did various schools of thought produce classifications of the fundamental qualities of the objects of the senses, but they also classified the senses themselves; various schools of thought placed the senses in distinctive orders according to various classificatory principles. The passage above about the smell-signs of impending death

⁵⁴ I do not quote here the whole passage, which continues in a similar vein and also gives some examples of odors (good and bad), such as sandalwood, aloeswood, urine, and corpses.

in a patient is taken from the *Indriyasthānam* (“Sense Section”) of the *Carakasamhitā*, a section of that work that specifically explains the sensible signs of an incurable condition in a patient. Here reference to the senses is not incidental, but rather center-stage.

From the very outset in this section the senses are listed in what we have seen to be the typical Buddhist order:

iha khalu varṇas ca svaraś ca gandhaś ca rasaś ca sparśaś ca cakṣuś ca śrotraṃ ca ghrāṇaṃ ca rasanāṃ ca sparśanāṃ ca... parikṣyāṇi pratyakṣānumānopadeśair āyuṣaṃ jijñāsamānena bhīṣajā //

Here indeed visible form, voice, smell, flavor, touch, sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching... are to be examined by direct perception, inference and teaching by the doctor desirous to know the lifespan. (*Carakasamhitā*, *Indriyasthānam* 1.3)

Not only do we see this particular order of the senses on this level, but it informs the structure of the whole section, which deals first with the signs of impending death by means of visible form and voice (*Adhyāya* 1: *varṇasvarīyam indriyam*), smell and taste (*Adhyāya* 2: *puṣpitakam indriyam* — where we find the passage discussed above), and touchable things (*Adhyāya* 3: *parimarśanīyam indriyam*). Following these chapters, the section continues with an examination of the sense organs, again listed in the distinctively Buddhist order of organs of sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touch.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ There is another noteworthy aspect of this passage: the three means of valid cognition (*pramāṇas*) that are mentioned. Elsewhere in the *Carakasamhitā*, in a chapter (which, unlike the *Indriyasthānam* reflects the Hindu order of the senses) there also occur these three *pramāṇas* with only one small difference: instruction of a trustworthy person (*āptopadeśa*), direct perception (*pratyakṣam*), and inference (*anumānam*) (*Vimānasthānam* 4.3). Here “instruction of a trustworthy person” is defined as follows: “There, ‘instruction of a trustworthy person’ means the word of a trustworthy person” (*tatrāptopadeśo nāmāptavacanam*) (*Vimānasthānam* 4.4), and the text then proceeds to describe the qualities of this sort of person. Thus these three means of valid cognition, and their variants, would appear to be a common feature of this whole text. But is this compatible with the suggestion that this particular part of the text shows Buddhist influences? After the philosopher Dignāga, Buddhist *pramāṇa* theory held there are only two means of valid cognition, scripture being a part of inference. Yet, as Tucci notes (1929:470), some Buddhist logicians earlier than Dignāga did indeed accept

Was the person who originally composed or compiled this part of the *Indriyasthānam* a Buddhist, or at least deeply influenced by Buddhist intellectual culture? If there were just one such list of the senses, admittedly the connection would be rather weak, but here in the *Indriyasthānam* this order of the senses is very prominent indeed, and as mentioned above, the senses themselves play a quite central role in the section.

On closer examination the situation becomes quite complex, even confusing. Firstly, it is important to put this section in the context of the *Carakasamhitā* as a whole: does the whole text consistently repeat this order of the senses? Are other Buddhist features present? The *Indriyasthānam* is the fifth section of the *Carakasamhitā*, a title which, as Wujastyk (2003:5) notes, “hides a great deal of poorly understood literary history.” This text is generally presented as the teaching of the sage Ātreya to Agniveśa, and Caraka himself claims only to have edited (*pratisamśṛta*) the text. The text then seems to have been further revised, most likely in the fourth or fifth century C.E., by Dṛḍhabala whose name appears in sections six, seven and eight of the text.⁵⁶

As Priya Vrat Sharma has noted (Sharma 1992:182–84), there are numerous Buddhist terms found in the *Carakasamhitā*, and Zysk (1991) has also discussed early Buddhist influences on traditional Indian medicine; therefore the suggestion that a text such as the *Carakasamhitā* displays some Buddhist features is nothing entirely new. What I believe is new though, is the observation that this one chapter in particular would appear to show stronger Buddhist influences than some other sections of the text as a whole, in which this order of the senses is by no means universally found. This is significant in the light of the complex textual history of the *Carakasamhitā* noted by Wujastyk.

Yet, Dasgupta observed that “the whole foundation of his (Caraka’s) medical physics is based on the Vaiśeṣika physics” (Dasgupta 1963:280),

three *pramāṇas* — Asaṅga for instance accepted perception, inference, and also scripture (*āgama*). Given that the *Carakasamhitā* was most likely composed before the time of Dignāga, who lived in the late fifth to early sixth centuries of the common era, we might even go so far as to cautiously suggest that the above passage, with its Buddhist sense-order, may be an early survival in Sanskrit of a such a pre-Dignāga *pramāṇa* theory.

⁵⁶ Again, I closely follow the clear account of Wujastyk (2003:4).

and it is clear that the passages Dasgupta discusses from the *Sūtrasthāna* and the *Śarīrasthāna* show marked similarities to Vaiśeṣika ideas. In the latter section Dasgupta mentions, the *Śarīrasthāna*, we also find the typical Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika order of the senses.⁵⁷ But later, in the *Sūtrasthāna* that he also mentions to support his view, we find another passage that uses the sense order associated with Buddhists,⁵⁸ this time following a discussion of *pramāṇas*, in which we are now given four *pramāṇas*: instruction of the trustworthy (*āptopadeśa*), perception (*pratyakṣam*), inference (*anumānam*), and combination (*yukti*),⁵⁹ and in which we are also told that “trustworthy scripture means the Veda.”⁶⁰ This passage complicates the picture still further, and maybe we should qualify what we considered above about the “Sense Section” (*Indriyasthāna*), observing that is not necessarily Buddhist, and rather that it quite clearly shares the Buddhist order of the senses, quite possibly owing to Buddhist influence.⁶¹ The variety in the given orders of the senses in the *Carakasamhitā* is quite striking, since the *Śarīrasthāna*, in discussing embryology, contains a quite explicit statement of the correspondence of the elements and the senses⁶² — a typical Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika idea in a typical Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika order, yet this chapter immediately precedes the *Indriyasthāna* with its Buddhist order of the senses. The picture is really rather confusing, but hopefully attention to such details as the one we have examined here may help shed some light on the history of this text and others. It is important also to emphasize that I am not claiming that attention to the order of the senses will answer *all* our problems concerning this text, but rather, that it is something to which we should pay attention in addition to noting the *pramāṇas*, and so

⁵⁷ *śarīrasthāna* 1.27 (ed. Priyavat Sharma 399).

⁵⁸ *sūtrasthāna* 9.37 (ed. Priyavat Sharma 75).

⁵⁹ *sūtrasthāna* 9.17 (ed. Priyavat Sharma 72). Pierre-Sylvain Filliozat (1990) discusses this passage and the interpretation of this unique fourth *pramāṇa*. It is defined as the seeing by the intellect of states with many causes: *buddhiḥ paśyati yā bhāvān bahukāraṇayogajam* / *Sūtrasthāna* 11.25ab. Unfortunately, further investigation of this question lies beyond the scope of this article.

⁶⁰ *sūtrasthāna* 9.27 (ed. Priyavat Sharma 73).

⁶¹ Of course one might equally suggest that the Buddhist analysis of the senses took much from a certain school of medicine that taught this particular order of the senses.

⁶² *śarīrasthāna* 4.12 (ed. Priyavat Sharma 430).

forth, (which previous scholarship has indeed noted), in trying to get a better sense of the structure and development of the *Carakasamhitā*, as well as the connections between medical and philosophical texts more generally.

Conclusion

Odor is the quality of sensed objects that is most consistently “aestheticized” in Indian philosophy.⁶³ Although the classifications of odor do vary, especially in the earlier sources, at all times they include at least two terms that indicate that they are aesthetically good or bad. At least with regard to smell, all the Indian sources agree that the experienced world always has an aesthetic value.

As we have seen, though aestheticized from the earliest times, there were a number of quite varied classifications of odor, which only gradually converged on a more uniform account. One reason why the classification of smell became increasingly unified in India may be that this was part of a drive to “clear the table” for the key inter-sectarian debates. According to this scenario, dialogue between divergent traditions results in mutual concessions that permit agreement on background matters in order to highlight what were perceived to be more crucial differences on important matters. Indeed an argument generally requires not only a common language, but also a limited agenda, and therefore sectarian intellectual antagonism in India may at times have been as productive of uniformity as of diversity.

These concessions were not necessarily born of defeat in debate, but rather there could have been a tacit coalescence produced by the

⁶³ That is to say, amongst the terms used to name the fundamental qualities of the objects of sense experience in these discourses, those terms for odors, “fragrant” and so forth, are the most consistently value-laden, unlike those for other senses, such as “red,” “cold,” “salty,” and so forth. Of course, in this article we have only examined a quite restricted number of sources, and were we to look at others, such as the *Purāṇas*, we might find a different account of the sense objects. Also, we must not forget an important distinction here: that, although on this level of fundamental analysis, odors are the most consistently aestheticized sense objects, this is not to say that aesthetic values are not attributed to other sense objects in other types of discourse — that for example, “cold” could not be said to be good or bad.

awareness, or even emulation, of what appeared to be less potentially contentious notions held by the rival tradition. Thus, while the qualities of smell do in general coalesce, the orders of the senses remain radically different between the three traditions, and continue to reflect deep sectarian motivations. The above illustrates the complexity of what is going on in the discourses of Indian philosophy, and also supports the notion that sometimes the minor issues can be as interesting to study as the major ones.

In the traditional religious intellectual cultures of South Asia we see the co-existence of numerous systems with different philosophical, theological, and ethical preoccupations. In the case of the minor issue of smell, far from disagreement, we see increased uniformity, perhaps even conformity. But, with regard to the three orders of the senses, lists that would have probably been repeated in numerous contexts, we witness absolute conservatism, and these lists, redolent of other parts of their respective systems, constituted distinct sectarian markers. That the Buddhists were not sure of the rationale for their order of the senses was clearly something that made them insecure, and that they felt the need to discuss, yet even faced with this uncertainty it appears that there was no question of them abandoning their unique sense-order.

An educated 21st century European or American articulating what she believes to be the most important aspect of the sense of smell would be quite likely to mention that smells trigger vivid memories.⁶⁴ This is indeed true, but it ignores that fact that in the original context, when a smell is first experienced, the smell does not trigger a memory. Emphasizing this aspect of smelling tells one nothing about the original smell experience, nor indeed about the non-associative attributes of the smell — the smell itself is an empty place-holder connecting two times and perhaps places. Having considered the above material, it seems likely that a medieval (and, as I have seen in one case, traditionally trained modern) Indian intellectual would note something to the effect that smell is “good smell and bad smell,” referring to all smell experiences at all times, and not referring to the “triggering of memories” at all. For the analytic intellectuals of South Asia, and no doubt for many

⁶⁴ As Alain Corbin shows, this idea was already very common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Corbin 1986:82, 200–4).

others in their sphere, the significance of smells was that they make the smell-substratum pleasant or unpleasant, attractive or repellent.

Returning to the passage we saw at the beginning of the paper, about why people offer flowers and other aromatics to the gods, we can now easily read this in a new light. For, as stated above, this scholastic debate on smell clearly was not isolated from the rest of intellectual life, and the fruits of this theoretical reflection, no doubt present in the minds of many educated and literate people, could be used to explain and understand the role of smell in other aspects of religious culture:

For the smell produced from flowers is taught⁶⁵ as of two types: desirable and undesirable. One should recognize that the flowers with desirable scent are for the gods. (*Mahābhārata*, *Anuśāsanaparvan* 13.101.26)

As Śukra explains, the smells of flowers fall into two types. These two types are the now very familiar two-fold definition, here stated as “desirable” and “undesirable”⁶⁶ Desirable (i.e. fragrant) smell is not simply a subjective response to the flower, but rather fragrance is an actual quality of the smell of the flower-in-the-world. If we offer these actually fragrant flowers to the gods,⁶⁷ they cannot help but be pleased by the smell, and will then reciprocally act to help the flower-donor be happy also. Here, a somewhat dry analysis of the fundamentals of experience

⁶⁵ Indeed, the term “taught” (*smṛta*) explicitly refers to the use of another authority here.

⁶⁶ The terminology “desired” (*iṣṭa*) and “undesired” (*aniṣṭa*) echoes that of the other passage in the *Mahābhārata* that provides a nine-fold classification of odor. As noted above, it seems that this terminology, not specific to odors, was later dropped in favor of more precise terms meaning “fragrant,” and so forth. This “taught” definition of smell is two-fold, which suggests that the passage is associated with a different, perhaps later, analysis of sense objects from the one that we saw in the other *Mahābhārata* passage.

⁶⁷ The whole passage raises a number of complex concerns that I hope to examine in the future. For example, only certain flowers and incenses are appropriate for certain classes of divine beings. Furthermore, different types of being are said to appreciate flowers via different senses. Notably the gods are said to appreciate flowers by their smell. I believe this may well have connections with the smoke-generating Vedic fire sacrifice, by means of which the gods were believed to consume the offerings in some models of sacrifice. Unfortunately, I cannot begin to touch on this important issue here. I am grateful to Professor Stephanie Jamison for her comments on this matter (e-mail message to author, February 23, 2007).

is cited in another context, a discussion of ritual, in order to explain the use of flowers and incense in the worship of the gods, providing a highly respectable theoretical foundation for a practice that was not explicitly sanctioned by Vedic orthodoxy.

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The Pulsating Heart and Its Divine Sense Energies: Body and Touch in Abhinavagupta's Trika Śaivism

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Abstract

This paper is a study of the significance of body and touch in the embodied thinking and lifeworld of the Hindu Tantric visionary Abhinavagupta (c. 975–1025 C.E.). I elucidate Abhinavagupta's embodied phenomenology of Śiva-Who-Is-Being, focusing on his multivocal metaphor of the pulsating heart and its divine sense-energies. I show that Abhinavagupta understood the central act of salvation, the recollection (*vimarśa*) of Being, or ultimate consciousness, as being a bodily felt process. Abhinavagupta drew on an earlier body of discourse and practice, the Kaula Trika substratum, whose pivotal ritual was that of sexual union. Thus, Abhinavagupta recovered the body and senses for consciousness in a sensuous and erotic phenomenology, so that *vimarśa* was understood precisely as the "body's recollection of Being," the bodily felt awareness of the Pulsating Heart.

Keywords

body and touch in religion, sense-energies, Abhinavagupta, embodied phenomenology, tactile awareness, sensuous ritual, self-transformation

... it is through the understanding and development of our various capacities in perception, gesture, and motility that we must work out first, and work out last, our potential for Selfhood in relation to Being as a whole. (David Michael Levin, *The Body's Recollection of Being*)¹

Hey You, Moon-Peak...
at the sudden surprise of your Touch...

¹ Levin 1985:8.

my consciousness . . .
 melts and melts away.
 (Abhinavagupta, *Dhvanyālokalocana*)²

This article focuses on the significance of body and touch in the world-view and lifeworld of Abhinavagupta, the Hindu Tantric sage of Kashmir (c. 975–1025 C.E.), as articulated in his encyclopedic synthesis of Trika Śaivite discourse and practice, the *Tantrāloka* (*TĀ*; “The Illumination of the Tantra”), and other related works. I elucidate Abhinavagupta’s embodied phenomenology of Śiva-Who-Is-Being by focusing on his multivocal metaphor of the pulsating heart and its divine sense-energies. Thus, in part, I am responding to a call by Lawrence Sullivan (e.g. Sullivan 1990) to redress an imbalance in History of Religions scholarship that devalues the body and the senses. I show that Abhinavagupta understood the body to be the primary locus for the central salvational act of awareness, the recollection (*vimarśa*; most literally, “touching”) of Being (*sattā*),³ or the highest reality, depicted in various ways by Abhinavagupta, including as Śiva, Śiva-Śakti, Bhairava, Consciousness (*cit*, *saṃvid*), and Mantra-Consciousness.⁴ Such awareness, described as “touching the fullness” (*pūrṇatā-sparsā*) of reality, refers to the bodily felt awareness of Being, and was most provocatively evoked by Abhinavagupta with his many-layered mytheme of the pulsating heart. In a hermeneutics of retrieval, Abhinavagupta drew on an earlier body of discourse and practice, the Kaula Trika substratum, whose pivotal ritual performance was one of sexual union. Abhinavagupta’s purpose was to recover the body and senses for consciousness in a sensuous and erotic phenomenology. Thus, the central act of salvation for Abhinavagupta was understood precisely as the “body’s recollection of

² Abhinavagupta, *Dhvanyālokalocana* 3.30: *tvāṃ candracūḍaṃ sahasā spṛśanti prāṇesvaram gādhaviyogataptā / sā candrakāntākṛtiputrikeva saṃvidviliyāpi viliyate me ||*. The Sanskrit is taken from Isayeva 1995:179, n.56.

³ The term “Being” (*sattā*) is used throughout a classic and foundational work by Abhinavagupta’s paramaguru Utpaladeva, the *Īśvarapratyabhijñānārikā* (“Stanzas on the Recollection of the Lord”); see Torella 1994. Torella discusses this term on p. 121, n. 29.

⁴ I will use all of these terms throughout this article, following Abhinavagupta’s own lead in employing different terms to emphasize different aspects of Being.

Being,”⁵ the touching or bodily felt awareness of the Pulsating Heart. I explicate Abhinavagupta’s phenomenology by tracing his evocation of the Pulsating Heart in three phases, focusing on (1) the divine sense-energies of the Pulsating Heart, (2) the intertwining of self and other, and the fusion of the senses, and (3) the vitality of the Pulsating Heart.

I. The Divine Sense-Energies of the Pulsating Heart

In this first section, I focus on the energies of the body in order to elucidate Abhinavagupta’s notion of awareness; these energies are referred to by Abhinavagupta as divine sense energies (*devatā, śakti*) of the Pulsating (*sphur-*) Heart (*hṛdaya*). Awareness (*vimarśa*) is precisely the bodily felt awareness of Śiva. Awareness may not be separated from the body and its energies; awareness takes place in, through, and as energies of the body. I will show that Abhinavagupta refers to touching (*sprś-*) and related tactile sensations, in describing *vimarśa* as a process of the body recollecting and recovering contact with Śiva; *vimarśa* then is a process of becoming aware of, transacting in, and transforming the divine sense-energies of the Heart, a practice of embodied ecstasy.

Abhinavagupta’s model of *vimarśa* is rooted in the earlier Kaula ecstatic vision, an embodied process of attracting the sky-going *yoginīs* and becoming their new Lord or Master. Alexis Sanderson has described the evolution that took place between earlier ecstatic practices and the later internalized practices that reached their culmination in Abhinavagupta and his tradition:

The Kāpālīka . . . sought the convergence of the Yoginīs and his fusion with them (*yoginīmelaka, -melāpa*) through a process of visionary invocation in which he would attract them out of the sky, gratify them with an offering of blood drawn from his own body, and ascend with them into the sky as the leader of their band.

⁵ I take this phrase from Levin 1985. In my use of this phrase and in my general approach to Abhinavagupta’s lifeworld, I am methodologically influenced by Levin, who borrows the term “Being” most directly from Martin Heidegger, but distinguishes himself from the latter by continually reminding us that awareness of Being is always embodied. What I want to show in this article is that such an embodied phenomenology is relevant to the study of Abhinavagupta and to the History of Religions; my purpose is not to make any facile comparisons between Abhinavagupta’s Being and Heidegger’s Being.

The Kaulas translated this visionary fantasy into the aesthetic terms of mystical experience. The Yoginīs became the deities of his senses (*karaṇeśvarīs*), revelling in his sensations. In intense pleasure this revelling completely clouds his internal awareness: he becomes their plaything or victim (*paśu*). However, when in the same pleasure the desiring ego is suspended, then the outer sources of sensation lose their gross otherness. They shine *within* cognition as its aesthetic form. The Yoginīs of the senses relish this offering of “nectar” and gratified thereby they converge and fuse with the *kaula*’s inner transcendental identity as the Kuleśvara, the Bhairava in the radiant “sky” of enlightened consciousness (*cidvyomabhairava*). (Sanderson 1988:680)

Thus, Sanderson points toward the *yoginīs* becoming the divine sense-energies, and the master of the energies becoming the Heart, the Center of these energies. Now what I will focus on in this article is how Abhinavagupta’s interpretation of the Kaula tradition is an embodied phenomenology of consciousness. In other words, I am not interested here in how one set of ideas was superimposed over an earlier set of ideas (for that, we may turn to Sanderson’s various writings),⁶ but, rather, in how Abhinavagupta’s interpretation was meant to describe bodily perceptions and experiences. Abhinavagupta understood that any transformation of consciousness must be a transformation of the body and its senses. Thus, recovering the body for consciousness in his embodied phenomenology, Abhinavagupta infused the power and energy of the Kaula ecstatic vision into his own vision, into his own model of recollection, maintaining a continuity between the process of awareness in his tradition and the previous tradition. He does this not merely to take over previous metaphysical systems with his new metaphysics, but to continue the Kaula process of practicing an embodied ecstasy, the process of transacting in energies, attracting all energies, the sky-going *yoginīs*, and gathering them back to the Heart, as a process of liberating and, thus, re-empowering the body and senses.

Awareness as Touching

I want to first argue that in recovering the body for consciousness, Abhinavagupta retrieves the intimate link between touching and awareness.⁷

⁶ In addition to Sanderson 1988, see Sanderson 1985, 1986a, 1995.

⁷ On “touching” and its relation to awareness, from the perspective of philosophy, see Merleau-Ponty 1962 and 1968; Levin 1985; Wu 1998, especially 294 ff. (section

Indeed, the sense of touching is ranked highest of all perceptions in Abhinavagupta's blueprint of the categories of reality (*tattva*) (*TA* 11.29a–34a), and becomes equated with the highest level of Śakti. Further, the highest process of awareness, *vimarśa*, from the root *mṛś-* “to touch,” is in fact grounded in this primordial sense. Now why is that so significant? Previously, the notion of *vimarśa* has been described as a type of disembodied cognition. For example, in Alexis Sanderson's earliest work, *vimarśa* is translated simply as “self-cognition” (Sanderson 1988:695). There is an implication that *vimarśa* is a purely cognitive process, leaving out the body. In Sanderson's later works and in the context of his theory of “overcoding” (the idea that one metaphysical system encompasses a previous one), he changes his translation of *vimarśa* to “representation” (Sanderson 1992, esp. 288, n.32). The new translation still reflects a metaphysical bias that favors conceptual systems and *concepts of the body* over the bodily processes of awareness and *perceptions by the body*.⁸ For Sanderson, “representation” refers to the way a practitioner conceptually represents reality to himself, the way he thinks — without a body — about reality. Of course I recognize the great value of Sanderson's work in understanding Abhinavagupta's ideas, including *vimarśa*, in the context of the conceptual systems that

on “Inner Touch”); most recently, Chrétien 2004:83–131 (section entitled “Body and Touch”), provides a phenomenological reading of Aristotle's writings on touch, and argues that both vision and hearing are grounded in the human capacity to touch. From the perspective of psychology and anthropology, see Montagu 1971, which discusses the “mind of the skin,” or how touching affects behavior. On the aesthetics and anthropology of the senses, including the sense of touch, see works by David Howes and Constance Classen, especially Howes 1991 and Classen 1993. From the perspective of religious studies, see Holler 2002; Chidester 2000; and Glucklich 1994. For a neuroscientific account on how limited awareness ordinarily blocks out the deep and complex tactile dimension that may be recovered by subtler forms of awareness, see Austin 1998:399–402 (his chapter “The Feel of Two Hands”). Finally, on touch and its relation to robotic consciousness, see Anne Foerst 1994.

⁸ I am following a distinction made by Ariel Glucklich (1994). Glucklich has also argued that the notion of “encompassment,” used in Vedic Studies, reflects a metaphysical favoring of conceptual systems. I am arguing that the notion of “overcoding,” used in Tantric Studies, particularly by Alexis Sanderson, similar to the notion of “encompassment,” also reflects this metaphysical bent toward cognition without the body. On “overcoding” and its relation to “encompassment,” see Lawrence 1999:36–37.

Abhinavagupta had to contend with. Nonetheless, consciousness for Abhinavagupta can never be reduced to pure thinking (Gupta 1988:35). Now *vimarśa* may be said to be a type of “knowing,” but this is not a pure disembodied cognition or purely metaphysical representation. Even as a type of “knowing” it must be one that includes the body; in other words, *vimarśa* is a process of bodily knowing. Thus, my examples below are meant to show that Abhinavagupta understood awareness as a type of touching precisely for the purpose of recovering the body in his understanding of consciousness.

To redress the imbalance that favors mind over body, and to finally get at the bodily dimension of the term *vimarśa*, I translate this term as “the body’s recollection of Śiva” or even “the body’s recollection of Being.”⁹ For Abhinavagupta, although the recollection is bodily, the term “Śiva” in the phrase points to Abhinavagupta’s insistence that ordinary forms of awareness, i.e., the dualistic awareness of things, ordinarily turn one away from awareness of Śiva. I will also be translating the term *vimarśa* as “reflexive awareness” or “guardian awareness.” “Reflexive awareness” indicates that the highest awareness is a process of continually turning back toward Śiva or Being, the ultimate reality which for Abhinavagupta is the ground of all awareness. The term “guardian awareness” indicates a “deep” and “full-bodied” awareness that guards or protects Being, or maintains contact with Being.¹⁰ With an “awakened heart” and aware of its ground, a “background of joy,” the Self practices “intense vigilance” of Being, experiencing an “intimate union” between Self and Other, subject and object.¹¹ For Abhinavagupta,

⁹ My phrase purposely refers to Levin 1985, a work which has deeply inspired and influenced me in this article. This is an analysis of the connection between awareness and the body, in the deep process of recollecting Being. The work is also especially relevant in understanding the deep gestures that make up part of the tantric *sādhana* (the “*mudric*” processes of the body). Levin 1989 and Levin 1988 are also relevant; the former especially to listening and speaking (“*mantric*” processes of the body), and the latter especially to visualizing and seeing (“*mandalic*” processes of the body).

¹⁰ I am following David Michael Levin’s description of awareness which recovers its etymological links to guarding, maintaining, and protecting Truth and Being. See Levin 1985:270 and 276.

¹¹ Lilian Silburn, commenting on Abhinavagupta, *TĀ* 4.130–146 and Jayaratha’s corresponding commentary, in Silburn 1988:143.

guardian awareness implies that one touches or makes contact with all things, and, at the same time, one touches or makes contact with Being, the highest reality.

The primordial meaning of the term *vimarśa*, “to touch,” is always retained by Abhinavagupta as he unfolds what it means to be aware; to recollect Being is a type of “touching.”¹² Although as we will see this special form of awareness arises in the act of external forms of touching, Abhinavagupta is also referring to internal tactile sensations to describe awareness. Touching then can be “inner touching,” the bodily felt sense of Being.

Abhinavagupta’s linking of the two notions is supported by etymology. *Vimarśa* is derived from the root *mṛś-*, meaning “to touch.” Other primary meanings of the term include “to stroke, to grasp, to take hold” (Monier-Williams 1899; Lanman 1864). In the form *marśana*, it may mean “touching a woman,”¹³ and indeed Abhinavagupta used the term to refer to awareness that occurs in the context of sexual union (Skora 2001, chapter 4).

The association of the notion of “knowing” with notions of “touching a woman,” or “sexual intercourse” is found in other cultural contexts. Thus, in the Hebrew Bible for example we find the term *jada*, meaning both “knowing” and “sexual intercourse.” To hint at the profound significance touching holds for awareness, and why touching, skin, and sexual intercourse are linked with energy, consciousness, and the process of knowing, by both Abhinavagupta and others, I briefly digress to point to the scholarship of Anne Foerst, who has described her work as both a theologian at Harvard Divinity School and robot scientist at MIT’s artificial intelligence laboratory.¹⁴ Foerst has argued

¹² At the same time this is not to say that the other senses were unimportant. In fact, all the senses were important for Abhinavagupta and his tradition. Thus the *Vijñānanabhairava Tantra* recommends that the yogin meditate on the joy derived from all kinds of sensations: touching in sexual intercourse, seeing a friend, eating a delicious meal, and hearing a beautiful song. Further, in discussing the secret ritual, Abhinavagupta continues an essential notion of Tantra: practice is always embodied; one attains identity with Bhairava through the body (*kāya*), speech (*vāc*), and mind (*manas*).

¹³ A possible Slavic parallel to the root *mṛś-* is **mrkati* meaning “to copulate.” Cited in Alper 1987:190–91, n.1.

¹⁴ I am following a summary of Foerst’s research that is found in Kiesling 1999:52–53. See also Foerst 1994.

for a new paradigm in understanding the conditions for making robots more aware, i.e., what it would take for higher forms of consciousness to arise. She and others in her field are discovering that consciousness must be embodied, and thus her work attempts to allow robots to develop a capacity for “touching.” Seeing that consciousness may have its “genesis” in touching and the skin, Foerst is especially influenced by the interpretation by a fourteenth-century rabbi, Abraham Ibn Ezra, of a biblical passage (Genesis 3:21) in which God gives human beings the gift of skin and, thus, the gift of touching. Foerst understands that skin and touching ultimately make human beings aware, allowing both a sense of Self and a sense of Other. Thus, sexual union, the most intense form of touching, becomes the paradigmatic way that we go out of ourselves, and thereby get back into ourselves. Interestingly, a passage by Abhinavagupta on Being’s fullness of consciousness (*TĀ* 3.100) is similarly interpreted by Don Handelman and David Shulman to mean: “We know ourselves only in a context of not knowing” (Handelman and Shulman 1997:187). In other words, full self-awareness may only be developed in relation to other-awareness. For both Abhinavagupta and Abraham Ibn Ezra, the skin is the interface serving as both boundary and passageway between Self and Other. Sexual union takes place through the skin, the human interface, allowing the Self to be face-to-face with the Other.

Returning to the etymology of *vimarśa*, its meanings of “to know, to consider, to take hold of mentally” are only derivative, arising from the primary meanings of *mṛś-* that link it to touching. One knows an object precisely because one is able to touch it or make contact with it; and even seeing an object is touching it. Thus, Gonda notes that for the Vedic seers, seeing in fact was precisely understood as touching.¹⁵

That Abhinavagupta himself held the sense of touch to be of primary importance in the development of self-awareness is seen in Abhinavagupta’s unusual and emphatic response to a verse in the *Spandakārikā*

¹⁵ Gonda 1969:19. Diana L. Eck also notes the connection between seeing and touching in her classic work, *Darśan: Seeing the Divine Image in India* (Eck 1998:9). Eck does not incorporate this insight into her account of temple worship and the use of images, both of which include an important tactile dimension. For a critique of this text from the perspective of “anthropology of the senses,” and how both “tasting” and “touching” complement “seeing” in particular contexts of Hindu worship, see Pinard 1991.

(*SpK*; “The Stanzas on Vibration”). The verse describes the experiences of a yogin experiencing subtle forms of awareness, and Abhinavagupta’s response clearly highlights the significance of touch. Abhinavagupta’s response is unique as other commentators on the same verse essentially ignore the fact that the verse mentions only four of the senses, excluding the sense of touch (Dyczkowski 1992:251). However, Abhinavagupta writes:

Smell, Taste, and Form, becoming more and more subtle, dwell respectively within the Earth, up to the end of the level of qualities, and up to the end of *Māyā*. However, abiding [at even a higher level of reality] at the end of the principle of Energy, being most subtle indeed, is a certain Touch, which yogins always long for. And at the limit of this Touch, [there arises] recollection, whose form is the pure sky of consciousness. One who mounts this moves toward the supreme whose nature lights up by itself.¹⁶

For Abhinavagupta the *SpK* verse means that touch is the most important of the senses in that unlike the other senses which can hinder one’s ascent toward the highest consciousness, touch in fact is an aid to liberation and higher forms of awareness.¹⁷

Abhinavagupta also refers back to the *Svacchandatantra* (*SvT*; “The Tantra of Unbound Bhairava”), which describes three stages of experience that the tantric practitioner traverses on his way to touching the highest reality (here and in the rest of this paragraph, I am following and summarizing Dyczkowski 1992:255). Significantly, whereas the first two stages are marked by visual and aural sensations, the final and highest stage is marked by a subtle “tactile sensation,” compared to the feeling of “an ant crawling along the body.” In this stage the tantric practitioner becomes “the cause of the universe” as the “power of [his] consciousness” blissfully and fully touches at once both the external world and the Reality known as Śiva.

¹⁶ *TĀ* 11.29a–31b (in Dwivedi and Rastogi 1987): *dharāyām guṇatattvānte māyānte kramaśaḥ sthitāḥ / gandho raso rūpamantaḥ sūkṣmabbhāvakrameṇa tu // iti sthite naye śaktitattvānte’pyasti sauḥkṣmyabhāk / sparśaḥ ko’pi sadā yasmai yoginaḥ sprhayālavaḥ // tatsparśānte tu saṃvittih śuddhacidvyomarūpiṇī / yasyām rūḍhaḥ samabhyeti svaprakāśāt-mikām parām //*

¹⁷ See *TĀ* 11.32a–34a. On touch as a vehicle to the awareness of God, in the writings of the medieval Christian mystic St. John of the Cross, see Chrétien 2004:130–31.

Abhinavagupta's commentator, Jayaratha, substantiates that this touching sensation is an "inner touching," or something felt within the body, describing it as a kind of "tingling" sensation (*pipīlikā*),¹⁸ relying on the same term found in the *SvT* (4.382). Such inner touching may be understood as the "tingling" or "chill down one's spine" felt in the flash of awareness. Hindu sacred narratives have much to contribute here, from Rāma's attainment of a new awareness, not merely cognitive but "transformative" and "generative,"¹⁹ and hence I would argue bodily, to Arjuna's initial transformation, reflected in his body by the tingling of his flesh, as well as the narrator Sañjaya's own recollection of that transformation and subsequent sublimation of the flesh. Lilian Silburn appropriately refers to this touching, a gift that leads one to higher bodily felt senses, as the "touch of grace" (Silburn 1988:139). Finally, the *Vijñānanabhairava Tantra* (*VBhT*; "The Tantra of Bhairava-Who-Is-Awareness") also describes an inner tactile sensation (*sparsā*) associated with religious experience as a kind of "tingling":

By holding back the entire stream [of external sensory activities],²⁰ through the gradual upward movement of the energy of breath, at the time of the tingling touching sensation, the highest joy unfolds [throughout the body].²¹

That Abhinavagupta's emphasis on touch was to be taken as significant is substantiated further by looking at his main disciple Kṣemarāja's writings on touching. Kṣemarāja praises this sense in his commentary on the *SpK*, in which touch is explicitly mentioned in verse 8:

Indeed the individual does not set in motion the driving force of pre-cognitive impulse, but from touching the inherent power of the self, he becomes equal to it.²²

¹⁸ Jayaratha, *TĀV*, commenting on *TĀ* 11.29a–31b, p. 2120.

¹⁹ This was suggested by David Shulman in an e-mail to me dated March 17, 1998.

²⁰ Silburn 1976:108–9.

²¹ *VBhT* verse 67 (in Sastri 1918): *sarvasrotonibandhena prāṇasaktyordhvayā śanaiḥ / pipīlasparśavelāyāṃ prathate paramaṃ sukham* //.

²² *SpK* verse 8 (Kaul 1925): *na hīcchānodanasyāyāṃ prerakatvena vartate / api tvātmabalasparśātpuruṣastatsamo bhavet* //.

Kṣemarāja explains that such touching refers to the power of Consciousness, whose nature is Vibration, entering him, or to becoming immersed in such power. Also distinguishing himself from other commentators who pass over this phrase, Kṣemarāja pauses to emphasize its significance, following Abhinavagupta and saying that it is precisely the sense of touch that predominates in the stage of Śakti (see Singh 1992:58–60).

Abhinavagupta is consistent in his interpretation. Elsewhere, in Abhinavagupta's description of the Kaula ritual of sexual union, Abhinavagupta makes it clear that ritual is to be interpreted not only through the registers of light and sound but also through that of touch. Thus, at *TĀ* 29.158b–160a, the eightfold Bhairava is said to be composed of light, resonance, and touch.²³ Similarly, during the rising of *kundalinī* to a higher level (*unmanā*) during sexual union, the ascent is correlated with light, sound, and touch, with touch again being at the highest level.

Abhinavagupta also understands that one may touch the highest reality through his use of various other terms such as those derived from *ādā-* and *labh-*. For example, at *TĀ* 29.164a–166a, Abhinavagupta employs the term *ādiyate*, derived from *ādā-*, which most literally means “to grasp or to seize,” to describe the Primordial Sacrifice as that “through which the essence is taken hold of.”²⁴ Again there is a connection between the highest awareness and touching. The highest ritual act, in which the highest awareness is attained, is described as the grasping or seizing of the essence (in turn described by Abhinavagupta as the nectar which is the pure consciousness). That knowing is feeling or touching is indicated also by Abhinavagupta's use of terms based on *labh-*. To utter the mantra *SAUH* correctly is to attain it or to set it in motion.²⁵ Additionally, at the beginning of the *Parātrīśikāvivarāṇa* (PTV; “The Long Commentary on the Ultimate Triadic Queen”),

²³ *TĀ* 29:158b–160a: *kucamadhyahṛdayadeśādoṣṭhāntaṃ kaṇṭhagaṃ yadavyaktaṃ // tattcakradvayamadhyagamākārṇya kṣobhavigamasamaye yat / nirvānti tatra caivaṃ yo 'ṣṭavidho nādashairavaḥ paramaḥ // jyotirdhvanisaminakṛtaḥ sā māntrī vyāptirucyate paramā /*.

²⁴ *TĀ* 29.164. Grasping is a metaphor for sensory perception in the Upaniṣads also. See, e.g., *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 3.2.1–9: Olivelle 1996:36–37.

²⁵ See also Alper 1983 (this is, in part, a summary of Alper 1989:277); Rastogi 1990. In addition to the term *upalabdhī*, Rastogi also refers to use of the bodily-based term *anugraha*, i.e., “grasping” or “comprehending.”

Abhinavagupta employs a *labh*-term to describe the liberating process of awareness as “attaining the satisfaction of bliss” (Singh 1989:62–63). In light of the above examples, I suggest that Abhinavagupta’s language is more than “mere metaphor.” Attaining the highest reality is a process that begins in one’s body; thus, attaining the highest reality is to set it in motion, to feel it moving, or to touch it with one’s body, and thereby to experience liberation in one’s very own body.²⁶

In Abhinavagupta’s fifth chapter of the *TĀ*, on “the individual means to enlightenment,” Abhinavagupta describes the highest experiences of the tantric practitioner, including trembling, revolving, whirling, flying, and being stable; Abhinavagupta recognizes these experiences as tactile, and states that all of them are the result of touching the fullness (*pūrṇatāsparsā*) of Reality.²⁷ This is connected to an enumeration in the *Mālinīvijayottaratānta* (MVT; “The Tantra of Victory of the Garlanded Goddess”) of five yogic signs associated with bodily centers: bliss, jump, trembling, sleep, and whirling.²⁸ Touching fullness affects the various centers of the body, and the body is understood as making contact with fullness.²⁹ Thus, Abhinavagupta recognizes that knowing or “touching” Reality is a bodily experience, rooted in the very primordial sense of touching and its related kinaesthetic forms.

In the 29th chapter of the *TĀ*, where Abhinavagupta describes the *kulayāga*, a ritual of sexual union, Abhinavagupta uses the notion of touching to refer to both the act of sexual union and to the experience of touching the highest reality. He uses terms indicating tactile sensation: either the phrase “touching of penetration” (*praveśasamsparsā*) or the individual terms such as “penetration” or “immersion” (*praveśa*, *samāveśa*), to refer to the male partner penetrating the female partner, while at

²⁶ Indological scholars in general have often shied away from describing liberating awareness or any kind of knowing in terms of feeling. Robert E. Goodwin is the first scholar, I am aware of, to explicitly describe knowing in Abhinavagupta’s tradition as a type of feeling. See Goodwin 1995, esp. 54 and 77, n.12. My scholarship here takes the next step, i.e., I am making the point that for Abhinavagupta feeling is sensuously felt in the body.

²⁷ *TĀ* 5.101 ff.: discussed in Silburn 1988:71 ff.

²⁸ MVT 11.35: Silburn 1988:71.

²⁹ Silburn 1988:72.

³⁰ See, e.g., *TĀ* 29.114a–115b and 117b–119a; and Gavin Flood’s discussion in Flood 1993:289.

the same time referring to immersion in the highest consciousness.³⁰ Abhinavagupta also uses the term *vimarśa* in this context; coupled with his use of touching terms, we see that he grounds the notion of awareness in the body. *Vimarśa* is the experience that arises through the touching of penetration, the ultimate touching back towards supreme consciousness understood as the bodily recollection of Śiva Itself. Abhinavagupta writes:

In that couple, there arises an intense trembling from the mutual touching of penetration into the Highest Dwelling; even though they [that couple] excite the secondary wheels [the wheels of the lower senses], the secondary wheels are made up of that [the union, the Highest Dwelling, the primary wheel] and are not separate.³¹

Sexual touching here corresponds with touching or penetrating into the Supreme Consciousness. Such penetration again is bodily felt, not only externally but also internally. Touching of the highest reality tangibly manifests in the body of the couple as they tremble and as their senses are excited. For Abhinavagupta the notion of “sexual touching” simultaneously refers to external forms of touching and internal bodily felt awareness.

In the fourth chapter of the *TĀ*, verses 130–146, Abhinavagupta elucidates what it means for a subject to touch an object, or for the Self to touch the Other. Inspired by Jayaratha’s commentary on this passage, Lilian Silburn provides us with a provocative analysis, demonstrating in particular how Abhinavagupta uses the notion of “sexual touching” to refer to nondual awareness.³² Abhinavagupta’s and Jayaratha’s descriptions refer to both external touching and inner bodily experience.³³ Thus, Abhinavagupta cites a passage from the *Yogasamcāra*, evoking the notion of sexual contact or union (*mithuna*) as a way of understanding any kind of intimate union between the senses and their objects, the Self and Other. Silburn writes:

³¹ *TĀ* 29.114b–115a: *tadyugalamūrdhavadhāmapraveśaṃsparśajātasaṅkṣobham // kṣubhnātyanucakrāṇyapi tāni tadā tanmayāni na pṛthaktu !*.

³² In this paragraph, I am following and summarizing Silburn 1988:143 ff.

³³ There is a profound similarity between Abhinavagupta’s evocations and that of Merleau-Ponty, who also uses notions of “touching” to describe nondual awareness.

But rather than a mere contact, this is intimate union (*mithuna*) with a background of joy, in one with an awakened heart. The repeated friction between subject and object quickens the interchange and ends in fusion. Without such a friction the object remains limited and the subject does not gain access to the universal nectar. But through this friction, which induces the intensification of joy and energy, the delineations of the object dissolve and the subject/object duality ceases. (Silburn 1988:143).

Silburn describes the yogin as a transformer, interpenetrating with the world, as both world and his own body become transfigured. His Self plays in the field of the senses and experiences itself as the Heart, or creative matrix of the universe, in which subject and object intertwine in balance, and all its divine sense-energies are gathered together again in the Heart.³⁴ Abhinavagupta is evoking a bodily synaesthetic experience which I will say more about below.

Finally, in his *Dhvanyālokalocana* (*DhĀL*; “Eye on the Resonating Light”), a commentary on Ānandavardhana’s aesthetics, Abhinavagupta presents his own prayer as an example that evokes at once both the peaceful and erotic *rasas*. Most interesting is that the prayer highlights the tactile experiences of recollection, referring to the bodily felt sense of being touched by Śiva and the consequent melting of consciousness;³⁵ thus, again, he freely demonstrates the fluid relationship between body and consciousness and, in particular, the relationship between touching and consciousness. Abhinavagupta writes:

Hey You, Moon-Peak, Lord of my breath,
at the sudden surprise of your Touch,
having been frozen in deep despair of separation,
my consciousness,
like a moonstone-carved doll,
now melts and melts away.

(Abhinavagupta, *DhĀL* 3.30)

³⁴ Again, I am following and summarizing Silburn 1988:143 ff.

³⁵ Albert A. Johnstone (1992:34) relates the feeling of melting to another state of consciousness, that of compassion; the implication is that compassion too is a bodily felt sense: “Compassion . . . involves a specific complex of feelings in the tactile-kinesthetic body, in particular something on the order of a warm melting feeling in chest and throat, without which complex an action would not qualify as done from compassion.”

That Abhinavagupta is quite aware that his evocation of a recollective experience reveals recollection's underlying tactile dimension is clearly suggested by Abhinavagupta's introduction of this prayer, where he employs the turn of phrase "a touch . . . of the erotic."³⁶

Worship as Sensual Enjoyment

The significance of the body and its divine sense-energies is also seen in Abhinavagupta's interpreting worship as sensual acts that blissfully awaken one's consciousness, that allow one's awareness to be penetrated by bliss. At *TĀ* 3.208b–210b, Abhinavagupta writes:

The emissional energy of Śambhu thus abides everywhere. Out of it [arises] the ensemble of motions of the liquid bliss of joy. So indeed, when a sweet [song] is sung, when [there is] touching, or when [there is the smelling of] sandalwood and so on, when the state of standing in the middle [the state of indifference] ceases, [there arises] the state of vibrating in the heart, which is called precisely "the energy of bliss," because of which a human being is with-heart.³⁷

Abhinavagupta is describing an aspect of *Śiva-Śakti* known as *visarga-śakti*, the resurrectional energy of Being, continually surging back and forth. The state of awareness Abhinavagupta describes is an emulation of this divine energy of *Śiva-Śakti* and, at the same time, a means toward this divine level. Abhinavagupta states that such energy manifests on the human plane as motions, and by that he is emphasizing "e-motions."³⁸ Thus, joy or bliss is a type of motion, movement, or agitation (*vibhrama*), pointing towards awareness's rootedness in touching. Abhinavagupta understands joy as an inner type of touching, moving one human being outward towards other beings, and allowing that same being to move inward. Abhinavagupta recognizes that conscious-

³⁶ Abhinavagupta, *DhĀL* 3.30: translated by Ingalls, Masson, Patwardhan 1990:532.

³⁷ *TĀ* 3.208b–210b: *visargaśaktiryā śambhoḥ setthaṃ sarvatra vartate // tata eva samasto 'yamānandaravibhramah / tathāhi madhure gīte sparśe vā candanādike // mādhyasthyavigame yāsau hṛdaye spandamānatā / ānandaśaktiḥ saivoktā yataḥ sahrdayo janah //*

³⁸ See Glen Mazis's discussion of "e-motions" in Mazis 1993.

ness is embodied, that feeling is experienced as a type of motion or movement within the body.

Abhinavagupta draws from the field of sensory awareness to elucidate being moved in the heart: hearing a sweet melody, or touching, or smelling sandalwood. Abhinavagupta's example of touching draws on the *VBhT*, which equates touching with sexual union. These motions or "e-motions" are described as precisely the tasting (*rasa*) of bliss (*ānanda*). This tasting is connected to the Heart as one who experiences bliss is said to be sensitive, literally, "one-with-heart". This refers to both aesthetic sensitivity as well as religious sensitivity, the capacity to be moved, as the proper states for both aesthetic and religious performance. The opposite is not "getting it," not attaining any meaningful experience; in the religious context that means not being aware of Being, tantamount to being dead. Having heart, or being sensitive or sense-awakened, is being fully alive, able to move, to be moved, to enjoy oneself sensually.

At *TĀ* 3.262a–264b, Abhinavagupta writes:

Into the oblation-eating belly of one's own consciousness, all existing things are hurled violently; they sacrifice their portion of differentiation, consuming it by fire with their own energy. When the fragmentation of existing things is dissolved by [this] violent cooking, the deities of consciousness [the senses] eat the universe that has become the nectar of immortality [the "I"]. These [deities] now satisfied, they lie down with God, no different from [Him] who is Bhairava, the Sky of Consciousness, dwelling in the secret space of the full heart of their selves.³⁹

Abhinavagupta is discussing the deities of consciousness, i.e., the sense-energies, and he is talking about them as being satisfied. Referring to the earlier Kaula tradition, Abhinavagupta describes worship as extracting liquid bliss and satiating the deities of the senses who reunite with the Heart, their Center, their Lord Bhairava. The satisfaction of one's senses, the senses enjoying themselves, is a way of awakening one's awareness. Worship is able to transform awareness precisely because it

³⁹ *TĀ* 3.262a–264b: *nijabodhajāṭharahutabhuji bhāvāḥ sarve samarpitā haṭhataḥ / vijahati bhedavibhāgaṃ nijaśaktiā taṃ samindhānāḥ // haṭhapākena bhāvānāṃ rūpe bhinne vilāpīte / aśnantyamṛtasādbhūtaṃ viśvaṃ saṃvittidevatāḥ // tāstṛptāḥ svātmanāḥ pūrṇa hrdayaikāntasāyinaṃ / cidvyomabhairavaṃ devamabhedenādhīserate //*

is sensual. This connects to both contemporary forms of *pūjā* and older forms of temple and cave worship, both meant to induce sensual, erotic, and synaesthetic experiences (see below).

Awareness as Surging Forth and Expanding

For Abhinavagupta *vimarśa* is also a process of the Heart, the center of consciousness, continually surging forth (*ucchalana*) and opening and expanding (*vikāśa*) itself once again through sensual enjoyment, so that the Heart gathers together and unites its formerly dispersed sense-energies.

Abhinavagupta again connects the process of awakening to the flowing of bliss and the satisfying of the senses through external objects giving pleasure, such as food, perfumes, garlands, incenses, or by imagining things which give pleasure (see Flood 1993:289–90, 300). The stimulation of the senses is said to effect an opening or expansion (*vikāśa*) of consciousness, and the surging forth or overflowing (*ucchalana*) with bliss.⁴⁰ *Ucchalana* is another term that indicates motion and becomes applied to motion within the body, or “e-motion.” The term is derived from *śal-*, “to leap,” and literally means “to leap out or up.” Applied to the body, it refers to a surging forth of awareness, a great intensity of the emotions, powerful passion or fervor (Ibid.). In the present context, the satisfaction of the senses is leading to sexual union, and such intensity of emotion leads to immersion in the Bhairava state (see Ibid.:289–90). Abhinavagupta writes:

And the sacrifice is a satiating with respect to the outside, and that is known as an opening [of consciousness] (*vikāśa*). Overflowing of consciousness [arises] from what reaches to the inside of the wheel and the secondary wheel, imagined by the Śakti-possessor, reaching to the vital breath; or also from the flowing of bliss, from the taking of food, or from external [sensual objects] such as fragrance, incense, and garlands.⁴¹ In this way through shares of appropriate objects, the satisfying of

⁴⁰ See also Kanti Chandra Pandey’s brief exposition of relevant commentary by Jayaratha in Pandey 1963:621.

⁴¹ *TĀ* 29.107b–109a: *yāgaśca tarpaṇaṃ bāhye vikāśastacca kīrtyate // cakrānucakrāntaragācchaktimatparikalpitāt / prāṇagādapyathānandasyandino’bhyavahārataḥ // gandhadhūpasragādeśca bāhyāducchalanaṃ citatḥ /*.

the secondary wheels with one another should be done here, towards [the goal of] effecting oneness with the primary wheel.⁴²

Abhinavagupta also states that reflexive awareness is the expansion of consciousness through enjoyment; such expansion occurs simultaneously with the penetration of the primary wheel by the goddesses of the secondary wheels. Consciousness is described as flowing outwards, and the energy of the secondary wheels are flowing inwards at the same time:

At the time of the intense reflexive awareness of one's own-form (*nijasvarūpaparimarśe*), [which is] an opening [of consciousness] towards each of one's own various enjoyments, one after the other the goddesses of the secondary wheels reach the center wheel of consciousness.⁴³

Abhinavagupta again refers to the earlier Kaula tradition, where one attracts the goddesses out of the sky through offerings such as food, incense, flowers, and so on; the goal was to become the new lord or center of these wheels of *yoginīs*. Again, for Abhinavagupta, the practice has been internalized: the goddesses of the sky become the secondary wheels understood as the senses; the new center becomes the primary wheel understood as the site of the awakening of primary consciousness.⁴⁴ Such awakening is precisely reflexive awareness. Thus reflexive awareness is the experience of the overflowing of bliss that happens precisely at the time of orgasm, where the orgasmic experience itself is interpreted in terms of *yoginī*-related practices.

In contrast to limited forms of awareness, in which there is no connection to the Heart-Center, in which objects are scattered, dispersed, and separate, guardian awareness is a type of gathering, that is, a process of bringing the divine sense-energies back into the Heart. Abhinavagupta simultaneously evokes the dynamism and creativity of the awareness of Being, experienced most fully in the Kaula performance of

⁴² *TĀ* 29.109b–110a: *itthaṃ svocitavastvaṃśairanucakreṣu tarpaṇaṃ // kurvīyātāmi-hānyonyaṃ mukhyacakraikatākṛte /*.

⁴³ *TĀ* 29.111b–112a: *nijanijabhogābhogappravikāsinijasvarūpaparimarśe // kramaśo'nucakradevyaḥ saṃwiccakraṃ hi madhyamaṃ yānti /*.

⁴⁴ This is the higher Bhairava consciousness, attained through the mouth of the *yoginī* or the vulva. For the best exposition of the relationship between Bhairava consciousness and these real flesh-and-blood *yoginīs*, see White 2003.

sexual union. *Vimarśa* may be understood as “recollecting,” gathering together the parts of one’s self that have been dispersed out into the world of objectivity and that have caused one to forget the self’s connection to Śiva-Bhairava.

II. Intertwining of Self and Other

Vimarśa may also be described as the embodied experience of the intertwining (*yāmala*) of self and other, in a process that involves all the senses, in fusion or harmony (*melana*). By “fusion of the senses,” Abhinavagupta refers not only to fusion of the senses with one another, but also to the integration of the senses with the whole range of one’s body and consciousness, as one becomes fully pervaded by the divine sense-energies.

Both intertwining and fusion of the senses received particular attention by the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty.⁴⁵ Merleau-Ponty attempted to recover the body for consciousness, challenging others before him who were metaphysically biased towards a disembodied consciousness. I want to briefly summarize these two ideas of Merleau-Ponty as they allow us to make sense of Abhinavagupta’s own understanding of the body in relation to awareness. Here I will be following the insights of eco-philosopher David Abram, who has especially focused on Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of the role of senses in awareness. I first turn to the Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of fusion of the senses. This is often referred to as “synaesthesia.” Although synaesthetic awareness is often understood as a marginal phenomenon, for Merleau-Ponty it is a natural capacity of human beings. Every pre-discursive experience involves fusion of the senses and nondual awareness. It is only after the initial pre-discursive experience, when there is

⁴⁵ See Merleau-Ponty 1968, esp. 130 ff. (on “The Intertwining — The Chiasm”). See also Merleau-Ponty 1962, esp. 227–29, and the discussion of this work in Abram 1997. The following are also insightful discussions relevant to Merleau-Ponty’s work, especially concerning notions of touching, fusion, or intertwining: Levin 1985; Mazis 2002; Vasseleu 1998.

a turn to discursive cognition, that the senses and corresponding sense experiences become separated from one another. Abram writes:

...if I attend closely to my nonverbal experience of the shifting landscape that surrounds me, I must acknowledge that the so-called separate senses are thoroughly blended with one another, and it is only after the fact that I am able to step back and isolate the specific contributions of my eyes, my ears, and my skin. As soon as I attempt to distinguish the share of any one sense from that of the others, I inevitably sever the full participation of my sensing body with the sensuous terrain. (Abram 1997:59–60)

When ... I perceive the wind surging through the branches of an aspen tree, I am unable, at first, to distinguish the sight of those trembling leaves from their delicate whispering. My muscles, too, feel the torsion as those branches bend, ever so slightly, in the surge, and this imbues the encounter with a certain tactile tension. The encounter is influenced, as well, by the fresh smell of the autumn wind, and even by the taste of an apple that still lingers on my tongue. (Ibid. 60)

Abram thus describes how synaesthetic experience or the “blending of the senses” naturally inheres in pre-cognitive perception.

For Merleau-Ponty, the fusion of the senses is also related to intertwining of self and other, often referred to as nondual awareness of self and other. As we have already seen above, intertwining is “the full participation of my sensing body with the sensuous terrain.” Like fusion of the senses, intertwining may be said to be our primordial natural capacity in that preverbal experience is always suffused by the intertwining experience of body and its environment, and in particular, of one body and another. Thus, pre-cognitive experience involves both fusion of the senses and the intertwining of self and other. For Merleau-Ponty in fact fusion and intertwining mutually implicate one another. Again, Abram summarizes:

My senses connect up with each other in the things I perceive, or rather each perceived thing gathers my senses together in a coherent way, and it is this that enables me to experience the thing itself as a center of forces, as another nexus of experience, as an Other. ... Hence, just as we have described perception as a dynamic participation between my body and things, so we now discern, within the act of perception, a participation between the various sensory systems of the body itself. Indeed, these events are not separable, for the intertwining of my body with the things it perceives is effected only through the interweaving of my senses, and vice versa. (Ibid. 62)

For Merleau-Ponty, then, fusion of the senses and intertwining are two interdependent aspects of prediscursive experience.

To bring this home and to remind us that such experience is not only common, but also especially important when trying to understand Abhinavagupta's understanding of awareness, especially those forms of awareness expressed through or attained in ritual, I note here that synaesthesia has recently been the focus of recent research in ritual and performance studies, in the works for example of both Richard Schechner and Lawrence Sullivan.⁴⁶ Important for us is that Schechner's theories are inspired by the Sanskrit drama, especially as interpreted by Abhinavagupta. Further, influenced by Richard Lannoy's interpretations of the Indian arts in *The Speaking Tree* (1971),⁴⁷ Schechner highlights an important connection between, on one hand, the temples of Khajurāho and Māmallapuram, or the "theatre caves" of Ajañṭā, and, on the other hand, the Sanskrit drama, especially as interpreted by Abhinavagupta. The paintings and sculptures of the temples and caves may be seen as the natural predecessors of the Sanskrit drama; all were meant to induce a sensuous and synaesthetic experience (what Abhinavagupta refers to in various ways, sometimes as the tasting of "liquid bliss" [*rasa*]). I would add that just as the Indian play is connected to worship in the temples or caves, so is the *kulayāga*, the ritual of sexual union, connected to the Indian play. The connection is one Abhinavagupta himself makes; however the implications of such a connec-

⁴⁶ Schechner 1977 and 2001; Sullivan 1986. Both highlight synaesthetic experience, as first noted by Bell 1998:209. See also Goodwin 1995:50–86; Goodwin's discussion of Sanskrit poetry and drama at several places points to its synaesthetic dimensions. The experience of "flow" is also connected with the fusion of the senses; see Czikszentmihalyi 1986. See also, on the "intensity of 'flow'" in the context of ritual, Schechner and Appel 1990, as first noted by Bell 1998:208. See also Sullivan 2000:226, where Sullivan notes that the play is "co-involved" with existence. I take the implication to be significant: the bodily experience within the play or ritual may become indistinguishable from the bodily experience of "reality itself." Thus, we would do well to begin interpreting ritual phenomenologically rather than metaphysically. As I will point out below, Alexis Sanderson fails to appreciate the bodily significance of ritual in Abhinavagupta's interpretation precisely because of his metaphysical bent.

⁴⁷ On both touching and synaesthesia in this work, in addition to Schechner's references, see also pp. 53 and 190 ff.

tion have not been fully appreciated. I would suggest that fusion of the senses is a key to understanding both the *kulayāga*, and in turn, *vimarśa*, the full-bodied sensuous and synaesthetic awareness.

For Abhinavagupta, *melana*, or fusion, and *yāmala*, or intertwining, were understood as interdependent dimensions of *vimarśa*, the very precognitive awareness expressed in and attained through the ritual of sexual union. Abhinavagupta implicates the divine sense-energies (*śakti*) in the nondual intertwining experience when he describes deep awareness: the “I” and the “other” no longer exist; it is only as energies (*śakti*) that the “I” exists (*TĀ* 29.64). The “I” exists as sense energies, and such existence as sense-energies is recollected precisely in the intertwining experience.

Jayaratha also connects *vimarśa* to intertwining and fusion, stating that through this deep bodily awareness one becomes a Sky-Goer and fuses with the *yoginīs* (*TĀV*, commentary on *TĀ* 29.64, p. 3335). Fusion with the *yoginīs* is to experience existence as sense-energies.

Jayaratha conflates here external fusion with the *yoginīs* and internal fusion. Neither Abhinavagupta nor Jayaratha are trying to get away with simply superimposing one metaphysical system over a previous one; their statements should be read as phenomenological statements. There are two possible ways of making contact with the *yoginī* (Flood 1993:300). One may meditate on the *yoginīs* and reap the same transformative fruit. This makes sense only when it is recognized that imagination must not occur in a disembodied mind; meditation on the *yoginīs* is also a bodily phenomenon. To experience the intertwining of “I” and “other” is for Abhinavagupta a bodily experience, interdependent with the fusion of the senses. That the body is transformed is supported most fully by Abhinavagupta’s description of the Sky-Goer Gesture (*khecari-mudrā*) as the experience of the intertwining of one’s body and another self, of another body and one’s self, as the self moves in other bodies, and other bodies move in the self (*TĀ* 32.30–31).

For Abhinavagupta these yogic gestures refer to profound ways of holding one’s body, of experiencing one’s body. André Padoux, who has studied Abhinavagupta’s 32nd chapter in the *TĀ*, in which such yogic gestures, perceptions, and states of awareness (*mudrā*) are described, makes it clear that the highest experience in Abhinavagupta’s tradition, identification with Śiva, is, above all, a bodily experience, something

felt in the body. Here Padoux summarizes and comments on Abhinavagupta's description of the Sky-Goer *mudrā* at *TĀ* 32.12–31 according to the *Yogasamcāra*:

These Khecārī-*mudrās* are very complex and even bizarre yogic practices, combining body and hand gestures, strange facial expressions and the utterance of such sounds as *hā-hā*, together with mental concentration and visualizations. The total effect is that the adept feels that the *triśūlamāṇḍala* of the deity penetrates and pervades him completely, whilst he feels that his senses, his mind and his emotions are all fused with the deity and pervaded by the divine energies. He is not himself anymore; he is one with Śiva... in whom reside all the deities and who illuminates the whole universe.... But, however “mystical” this experience may be, it is felt within the body and it occurs because of the bodily postures, etc., of which the *mudrā* consists. The role of the body is paramount. (Padoux 1990b:71)

The experience of union is felt in the body. Even the *maṇḍala* is felt in the body. Much confusion is cleared away when we make a distinction between metaphysical statements and phenomenological statements Abhinavagupta makes about the body's deeply felt sense, its recollection of Being. The deepest level of awareness for Abhinavagupta is pre-cognitive. Abhinavagupta's language arises out of the body; his descriptions of various *mudrās* and other bodily modes make explicit what is known or felt bodily.

III. The Vitality of the Pulsating Heart of Mantra-Consciousness

The Pulsating Heart is also used by Abhinavagupta to evoke Mantra-Consciousness. In this evocation, the Pulsating Heart, the source of all mantras, and all mantras that remain in touch with their source are said to contain vitality (*vīrya*). What does that mean? How is it possible for mantras to contain vitality? Now certainly, some mantras, such as the *SAUḤ* mantra, evoke the Kaula ritual of sexual union and correspondingly the vitality of the *SAUḤ* mantra evokes the vital sexual fluids, also termed *vīrya*, the transaction of which was essential for the efficacy of the Kaula ritual.⁴⁸ The vitality of the mantra refers to the

⁴⁸ For more details, see the third chapter in Skora 2001. In this article, I am shifting our attention to the deep connection between mantra and bodily perception.

efficacy of the mantra while evoking the vital sexual fluids. The mantra works in dependence on its vitality, just as the Kaula ritual works in dependence on the vitality of the sexual fluids.

Although such interpretation connects Abhinavagupta's tradition to its earlier context, it does not fully answer our questions above, leaving us with the suggestion that the vitality of the mantra is simply symbolic. However, Abhinavagupta would certainly never say he was being merely metaphorical. Is there a different approach then in trying to answer this question? Is there some phenomenological validity to this notion that mantras contain vitality? Does vitality of mantra point to some experience? . . . to some experience in the body? Earlier I suggested that liberation for Abhinavagupta means re-empowering the body and the senses. I would suggest now that this is precisely what the mantra effects.

Now Frits Staal, who has tended to the notion of the mantra's efficacy, has urged scholars to pay more attention to mantra's pre-linguistic aspects. Staal notes that mantras are able to revitalize and liberate the very senses that have been previously deadened in their enslavement to the brahmanical law of purity; he surmises that mantras are efficacious precisely because they are pre-linguistic:

Nyāsa is a Tantric not a Vedic rite and, therefore, belongs to a different era. It is tempting to speculate that, by the time we arrive at the Tantric period, mantras are called upon to take away the guilt that centuries of moral disapprobation have attached to parts of the body and to bodily functions. No Hindu can engage in the "five Ms" without experiencing a feeling of guilt. To actually enjoy such activities is possible only if these feelings are overcome. Mantras can effect this because they are natural, like music, dance, and song. They exert a hypnotic influence that signals a breaking away from the tyranny of language and a return to the biological domain of the body. This is manifest in the extraordinary close relationship that exists in Tantrism between the limbs (*aṅga*) of mantras and those of the divine body. . . . (Staal 1989:84)

Mantra, through its pre-linguistic nature, works on the body directly, and hence is able to effect transformation. Transformation of awareness takes place precisely because the mantra acts on the body.

The notions of *vīrya* and *mantra* refer directly to bodily experience, and must ultimately be understood in terms of the body and senses. This is first indicated by the semantic field of the term *mantra* and related

terms *manas* and *muni*. Jan Gonda has provided us with the most rigorous analysis, which points to the deep connection between mantra and bodily perception. First, Gonda notes that *manas* refers to “mind *in the widest sense*” (Gonda 1963:250; the italics are my own), including not only “mental powers” but also “physical [bodily] powers”; not just rarified “spirit” and “thought,” but also creativity, “imagination,” inspiration, “desire,” emotion, feeling, and “mood” (ibid.). I would add here that what is being described is again bodily felt sense. Similarly a *muni* is someone who is “inspired” and “ecstatic,” who feels and is “moved” by a deep, “inward impulse” (ibid.). These impulses I contend are naturally felt in the body and through the body. The root *men-* includes meanings of being “moved” and inspired, and “experiencing [deep] impulses in heart and mind” (ibid.). Finally, Gonda describes *mantra* as “coming into touch or identifying oneself with the essence of the divinity which is present in the mantra” (Gonda 1963:255). Synthesizing Gonda’s analysis and emphasizing the bodily dimension, we can say that *mantra* means “coming in touch with Reality through being moved in the heart, i.e., being deeply bodily-moved.”

To say that mantras have vitality implies that the practitioner of mantra sensually experiences the vitality, i.e., the vitality of mantra awakens the senses of the practitioner, to ultimately recollect Being in the body. Thus, Jayaratha relates the bodily felt gesture that we have previously discussed to vitality:

At the time of immersion in *khecarīmudrā*, characterized by the six-fold *mudrā*, when there is kissing, enjoying, and so on, between one and the other, the Energy and the Energy-Possessor, [then] that experiencing awareness, whose nature is [bodily felt] awareness, arises; such is the vitality of mantra, whose own nature is [bodily felt] awareness of the supreme resonance divided into eight kinds, the unmanifest and so on.⁴⁹

Thus, Jayaratha connects vitality with awareness, an awareness that must be bodily felt in various ways. It is experienced in and as the ultimate bodily gesture, the *khecarīmudrā*, the *mudrā* of sexual union. It is

⁴⁹ Jayaratha, *TĀV*, commentary following *TĀ* 29.156a: *etasyāṃ śaḍaramudrālakṣaṇāyāṃ khecarīmudrāyāmāveśe śaktiśaktimātoranyonyasya pānopaḥbhogādau yo vimarsāt mā anubhavaḥ samudiyāt, tadavyaktādyāṣṭabhedabhinnaparanādāmarśasvabhāvaṃ māntram vīryaṃ syāt //*.

also the experience of eight levels of resonance or vibration by the yogin recollecting a bodily felt sense of Being, again with touch being the most subtle of these experiences.

As further examples of vitality being experienced in the body, I note that the ultimate goal of mantric practice is to awaken energy, as always involving the moving, stilling, and/or presencing of vital energy.⁵⁰ In the ritual of initiation or sprinkling such mantric vitality overflows through the pores of the skin of the guru into the disciple.⁵¹ In the *PTV*, the notion of vitality is again associated with the highest level of awareness, described as *kaulikī-śakti*, which on one plane is the vital energy of all the goddesses, on another the heart of the senses, and on a third plane the female and male sexual organs (Singh 1989:61–62). Describing *kaulikī*, Abhinavagupta quotes the *SpK*, describing divinization of the body as touching the power of the Authentic Self. He also cites another verse from the *SpK* which describes both the divinities and the senses as being effective through the power of vibration.

Understanding vitality as being experienced bodily helps us understand Abhinavagupta's notion of vitality: mantras are vital precisely because they effect a transformation of the body. Mantras embody Śakti and allow the body to feel Śakti (Gonda 1963:274, 284; Alper 1989:283). Mantra is never simply disembodied cognition. Mantric performance is a pre-cognitive, pre-linguistic, pre-discursive performance by the body, in all its deep ambiguity, involving touching, sensing, moving, and feeling.⁵² Mantras become bodies of power themselves that

⁵⁰ See Padoux 1990a:386 ff. (on *mantravīrya*).

⁵¹ See *TĀ* 23.33a-36b: translated in Muller-Ortega 1997:417. On initiation, see also Kvaerne 1975:90 ff.; and Davidson 2002:122–31 and 197–200.

⁵² Other scholars support the distinction I am making between mere cognition and pre-cognitive mantric performance with the observation that ritual performance moves beyond mere speech. Sullivan (2000:226) writes: “performance is ephemeral; it takes place only while a particular spectacle is going on. The spectacle is co-involved with existence itself. There are ontological implications: the play is the thing; the performance is only while it lasts. . . . we are closer to the *ex opere operato* efficacy of sacrament. . . . Performance is a setting quite different from the literalness of well-formed sentences that ground linguistic analysis. . . .” William Schweiker (1992:289, n.22) writes: “In saying that interpretation is a form of enactment I am not however restricting the concept of ‘performative’ to speech acts. . . . I am using it in an anthropological and sociological sense to denote those communal dramatic and ritual activities through which something (a myth, human action, a god) is presented in and for community.”

have the capacity to transform the body of the practitioner, dissolving discursive forms of awareness into deeper bodily felt states of awareness. Practicing mantra is a process of divinizing the body, becoming possessed by the mantra and hence by the deity who is the mantra.⁵³

Mantric performance gives rise to bodily transformation, a new way of being in the body and comporting oneself in the body, “disclosing a new [dimension of] reality” previously unnoticed (Alper 1989:276). Such reality is in fact always already there; such reality is the gift of our body waiting to be revealed. Thus Abhinavagupta tells us that the authentic gesture (*mudrā*) gives the gift of the Authentic Self in/through/as the body (*TA* 32.3).

IV. Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Throughout this article, I have been maintaining that awareness is connected to bodily felt sense, and that ultimate awareness is a recollection of Being that takes place in the body. I have taken Abhinavagupta at “face” value, assuming that his statements have to be understood as ultimately arising out of bodily experiences, that his understanding of consciousness is best approached as embodied phenomenology. In these final remarks, I want to describe this approach and its significance more rigorously.

The significance of an embodied approach may be highlighted by distinguishing it from a “conceptual” or “symbolic” approach. To get at this distinction, I first turn to Vedic Studies, where we can clearly see this approach playing itself out. Thus, Charles Malamoud, in approaching the issue of self and self-transformation in the context of Vedic ritual, favors, quite self-consciously, a “symbolic” approach over a “psycho-physiological” approach, describing both in the following introduction to one of his recent articles:

How does the sacrifice affect the sacrificer? What happens to the sacrificer, to his self, during the sacrificial process? In what respect, and to what extent, is he modified by it?

⁵³ See *Spandavivṛti*, commentary on *SpK* stanzas 26 and 27: Dyckowski 1992:105; Sanderson 1986a:175 and 175, n.2 (in reference to both *TA* and *SpK*); and Padoux 1990a:393.

Let it be clear that I am not looking for psycho-physiological answers to these questions. I am not trying to trace the measurable transformations to which a human organism is submitted when exposed to the material conditions and to the mental stress involved in the sacrificial process. I am trying to find not what happens “really” but what is supposed to happen. I wish to understand what is taught by the dogmatic texts of the Veda in a language we can very well call metaphorical... (Malamoud 2002:19)

A legitimate response to Malamoud is: well why not try to find out what “really” happens? Why not assume that the language being examined is not merely metaphorical, not simply symbolic? Why assume a split between what is supposed to happen and what really happens? Why wouldn’t reports of self-transformation go back to real bodily experiences? Interestingly, the same Vedic material has been illumined by Ariel Glucklich (1994), precisely by taking the approach that is rejected by Malamoud, which Glucklich describes as follows:

...every conscious experience has a physical-perceptual component that plays a key role in the way the world and the self are fashioned. The Hindu bather who goes into the river at daybreak does not leave his body in bed.... What happens to the body in the water, and in what sense is the body purified? Similarly, the bride who undergoes passage by means of an elaborate ritual is *not just being intellectually indoctrinated* into a new status. The new identity she acquires is contingent on the conscious *perceptual and physical manipulations* that take place during the rite. (Glucklich 1994:7; the italics are my own)

Glucklich, then, tends to images that are perceptions “by the body” rather than symbols that are conceptualizations (sometimes simply “of the body”). Glucklich applies his perceptual approach to various details of the Vedic ritual, while Malamoud applies his symbolic approach, sometimes to the very same details. For example, the same antelope skins receive quite different interpretations by Malamoud and Glucklich. For Malamoud, black and white antelope skins become symbolic of Vedic texts, with black hair symbolizing verses and white hair symbolizing chants (Malamoud 2002:21–22); on the other hand, Glucklich is interested in the skin as “the primary relational organ of the body,” which “defines relations in the world in terms of subjective perceptions” (Glucklich 1994:110). Glucklich then shows how perceptions by the body resonate with conceptual symbols, how symbols make sense in terms of bodily perceptions.

To see how this distinction applies to Tantric Studies, I will focus on two scholars, Alexis Sanderson and André Padoux; together their writings have formed much of the foundation of “Abhinavagupta Studies.” I would contend that Sanderson in his scholarship has focused on the notion of conceptual transformation without tending to changes in bodily perceptions; thus, we are left with states of consciousness that have seemingly become disembodied. To give a general indication of this emphasis, I have provided here a few classic examples of Sanderson’s approach from his important work, “Maṇḍala and Āgamic Identity in the Trika of Kashmir” (1986a):

His subsequent life of ritual and meditation is designed to transform this initial empowerment manifest in his membership of the sect into a state of permanent, controlled identification, to draw it forth as the substance of his conscious mind. Daily recreating the maṇḍala in mental worship he summons from within his consciousness the deities it enthrones, projecting them on to a smooth mirror-like surface to contemplate them there as the reflection of his internal, Āgamic identity. He aspires to know himself only as this nexus of deities, constituting for himself an invisible identity concealed within his worldly perception and activity, a heterodox, visionary Self of Power behind the public appearance of Purity sustained by conformity to orthodox society.

With Abhinavagupta... we see the metaphysical translation of this Āgamic deity-self... The maṇḍala is enabled to define and transmit this omnipotent “I”... In worshipping them [the goddesses] the initiate is to rehearse the liberating intuition that his true self is the undifferentiated deity-ground... Through the internal monologue of his ritual he is to think away the “I” of his identity in the world of mutually exclusive subjects and objects... His ritual and his meditation serve to create a mental domain in which the boundaries which hem in his lower, public self are absent...

Thinking of his lower, social subjectivity ‘from within’ as the contraction of the infinite power of his true, Āgamic self, he ritually internalizes a metaphysical ontology... (Sanderson 1986a:169–72)

In general then Sanderson discusses transformation purely in terms of the “conscious mind”; one may re-think reality, thinking away an old self, and thinking up the new Self. Sanderson draws a boundary between mind and body, showing a metaphysical preference for disembodied cognition. This is revealed most fully in the following statement in which Sanderson is most self-conscious about his method:

They are, of course, supposed to be a hierarchy of subtle levels in the final resonance of the *mantroccārah*, realized in yogic practice. But I have stressed here their mantric nature in ritual, the manner in which they are realized through discursive *mantraprayogaḥ* + *sthānānusaṃdhānam*, etc. In this sense the attainment of a certain level of mantra-resonance (*nāḍakalā*) or tattva is a verbal act, not some hypothetical experience of a level definitively beyond the reach of discrimination. . . . I see ritual as obviating the problem of experiencing that whose experience could not be confirmed in the mind since by definition such experience would be outside the parameters (the *kañcukāni*, etc.) of referential cognition. Ritual makes the impossible possible. It stages in the mind a transcendental, Āgamic identity and is empowered to this end by the belief that it is this transcendental structure which manifests itself as the worshipper and his worship, at a lower level of its own existence. (Sanderson 1986b:210)

Sanderson seems to be saying the following: (1) Yogic experiences are “mantrically” realized in ritual. (2) Therefore yogic experiences are realized only discursively, only verbally. (3) All experiences must be confirmed in the mind. (4) There are no experiences beyond the reach of discrimination, outside the parameters of referential cognition; such experiences are only hypothetical, indeed they are impossible. (5) Ritual is a world of play, it pretends, by fantasizing in the mind that what is impossible is not impossible; ritual derives its power from make-believing.

Sanderson’s assumptions are similar to Malamoud’s. Sanderson is interested in what is supposed to happen; he says however that what is supposed to happen does not really happen. He is led to that conclusion only because he has left out the body and thus the possibility for real transformation taking place in the body. What he leaves us with is a disembodied consciousness, and, therefore, a rationalization of ritual that fails to provide any compelling scheme for transformation. What takes place in ritual is only a matter for the mind. Not only is there no bodily transformation, there is in fact no body. If we are to believe the practitioner is transformed in Sanderson’s perspective, we must judge that the transformation is merely the superimposition of a fantasy worldview.

There are alternatives however that are more compelling. Here I turn now to Padoux’s speculations, speculations that have not been fully developed yet, either by Padoux or by Tantric Studies scholars, although the material I have presented in this article is a beginning, I believe,

toward fully developing these ideas. Padoux's speculations have profound implications for our field and hence it is valuable to review in detail a few noteworthy examples. Interestingly, we find Padoux making similar provocative remarks about each of the three primordial modes of performance, each of which concerns different aspects of the body: *maṇḍala* (visualizing, seeing), *mantra* (speaking, listening, pulsating and vibrating), and *mudrā* (gesturing, touching, carrying and holding oneself).

About *maṇḍala*, Padoux says the following:

To perform this Yogic practice of the maṇḍala is thus to experience the identity of the self and of the absolute. All the fantasmagory visualized in this way leads the Yogin to feel dissolved into the transcendental void of the absolute whilst being also inhabited in his body by the cosmos and its presiding deities. It is an interesting, but strange, process. If we consider that this Yogic, visionary trance-like state of bodily consciousness is to be experienced every day by the Śaiva adept, we may well wonder what psychological condition is thus induced in him, what kind of perception of the world he lives with. Can one feel fused with the absolute after having filled one's mind with such a fantastic scenery and still behave 'normally'? Of course, these ritual practices may have been performed merely in imagination without any real inner participation of the Yogin. They may even have been limited to the mere recitation of the mantras evoking the *tattvas* of the deities (*mantra-prayoga*). But what if they were really experienced? What if the Kaula adept, practising the ritual at least once every day, carried always in him this scenery? This is an interesting question—but one not to be answered here. (Padoux 2003:235)

Now what Padoux has done is the following: (1) He has rigorously articulated the way in which Abhinavagupta's writings lend themselves to two very different interpretations (each one with its own set of ontological commitments). On the one hand, as some interpretations have it, practice takes place "merely in the imagination"; or practice might be "mere recitation." (2) At the same time his language implies that if the latter is not the case then what is taking place is massive delusion: what is visualized is "phantasmagory" in a "strange process" that is far from normal. (3) In spite of Padoux's reservations however, even when trying to describe the experience with an emphasis on what is imagined, he gives us hints as to how to begin making sense of the process: this is something that the yogin "feels" and his body is affected as his body becomes inhabited by a new set of reality. In other words, Padoux opens

up the possibility that transformation takes place in the body. (4) And when he purposely contrasts this new way of interpretation with previous ways, his language offers even more clues: consciousness is bodily consciousness; we need to consider the physical and psychological condition of the yogin; we need to talk about perceptions (not just conceptions); instead of imagination we need to consider participation, the possibility that the practitioner really experiences, or embodies, carries in his body, a new reality.

Now about mantra, Padoux says the following:

Psychological or psychophysiological research methods could be applied to *mantrayoga*, where mantras, visualized as being in the subtle body whose image is superimposed by *bhāvanā* on that of the physical body, are usually considered as acting and moving together with *kuṇḍalinī*, which itself is a very particular internalized mental construction. Such mental and physical practices result in a particular image of the body, fashioned with the help of mantras, which abide in it and animate it. One could try to find, in this respect, how *nyāsas* act on the psychological plane. How, we may ask ourselves, does a yogin experience his body as he “lives” it when it is entirely imbued with mantras, supposedly divinized or cosmicized by them? The experience is sure to be of an unusual sort, which it would be interesting to know. (Padoux 1989:314)

Though at times Padoux again reveals a certain bias in his thinking (for example, he says that *kuṇḍalinī* is a mental construction, whereas for Abhinavagupta it is clearly a bodily reality), at the same time he again opens up the possibility of interpreting Abhinavagupta in a new way. Such a new interpretation considers the physical and psychological condition of the practitioner, how the yogin experiences the lived body (“the body one experiences or feels psychologically” as opposed to the physical body, i.e., the body as object) (Padoux 1989:318, n.25), and takes seriously the possibility that transformation takes place in the body.

Finally, about *mudrā*, Padoux has this to say:

...how is the bodily action [in ritual] experienced by the actor? How far is he involved in what he does? ... *Mudrās* are always gestures which accomplish something. But how much does one really achieve with gestures? How much does the actor believe he achieves?

...1) In most ritual works, notably the Śaivāgamas and śaiva paddhatis, the mere display of the prescribed *mudrā*, or even a mere statement of what is being

done, generally seems to be held sufficient [for ritual to be effective].⁵⁴ 2) In the Bhairavāgamas and other works of the bhairavic or kāpālīka tradition, ancient conceptions about the *āveśa* of the adept by the deity still seem to prevail, and *mudrās* are seen chiefly as bodily attitudes implying a mystical participation or experience on the part of the performer, or even in certain cases as purely mystical attitudes. (Padoux 1990b:74)

Padoux is aware of the possibility of a new method, a new way of interpreting in Tantric Studies. Such an interpretation would finally take seriously the perceptions by the body. Padoux refers to participation, bodily attitude, experience, and being possessed by a new reality. Such references are in the context of his question about accomplishing something, i.e., effecting real transformation, with bodily gestures.

I conclude now by showing how tending to the body and the bodily energies would allow us to make more sense of self-transformation. I realize I am painting in broad strokes; I think that nonetheless my reflections here — in combination with the material presented throughout this article — point toward a rigorous way of recovering the body for both Abhinavagupta Studies and the History of Religions.

I want to suggest that the new way of being discussed in Abhinavagupta's works only makes sense in terms of the body. Now what Alexis Sanderson has argued for is that Abhinavagupta's tradition was able to infuse "power" into the tradition of "purity" (and thus have both "power" and "purity"). Sanderson's scholarship (1985) gives us the following picture: the power culture, represented by the various Kaula traditions, arose out of the purity culture, represented by the Brahmanical cultures that were based on codes of purity (most importantly they included rules about what could be touched, and what could not be touched). The purity culture suppressed both the body and the senses; thus the necessity of the power culture derived directly from the suppression of the body (see Sanderson 1985: 192–93; also 198ff.). On one hand, there existed the purity culture, ruled by body neurosis and anxiety, a fear of the "spontaneity of the senses" (ibid. 193), and an attempt to master and control the body. In contrast there arose the power culture, erupting at the margins (ibid. 193, 199ff., 205) of a worldview unable to contain the body and the senses, no longer able to keep the

⁵⁴ Padoux is not explicit here and the parenthetical addition is my own.

body down. The eruption of the power culture was precisely an eruption of the body and its energies (*śakti*). Now from his analysis of these two cultures, Sanderson describes Abhinavagupta's movement itself as the infusion of power into the path of purity. I contend that such infusion of power would only make sense if there were a corresponding transformation of perceptions by the new bodies in this new movement. That is, if the new practitioner continued maintaining his neurotic obedience, if external standards of purity, "[r]ules of touch and touch-me-not" (Lannoy 1971:54) only continued to inhibit the body and its senses, then in fact there was no change, and we can not rightly speak of an infusion of power.

The transformations must be found in the body and the senses themselves. As Staal's reflections on the efficacy of mantra remind us, mantras transform the very senses that need to be transformed. What Abhinavagupta's movement effected was not merely a new way of conceiving the body, but a new way of conceiving *and* perceiving *through* the body. Through the body emerged a new way of being; Abhinavagupta's recollection is a recollection through the body, recovering what the body knew all along, that it always already pulsates in rhythm with Being itself.

Sanderson conceives of the transformation in terms of top-down metaphysics, as if Abhinavagupta overlaid a metaphysical system on top of bodily practices. I am suggesting that we begin thinking with Abhinavagupta through the paradigm of the body, and, in particular, through a paradigm of Touching, in which knowing is a type of Touching, consistent with the path of the Pulsating Heart, where knowing is feeling. One does not simply think away bodily inhibition, inhibition that has been heavily weighing on one's body, holding it down, and suppressing and op-pressing it, and ultimately preventing it from any creative gathering, laying down, and re-collecting of Being. Abhinavagupta's recovery of the body and senses demonstrate that one only transforms one's way of being in the body by means of the body. Thus, the Sky-Going gesture is the way the body holds itself in relation to Being. Abhinavagupta's descriptions of body and bodily gestures suggest that, for him and his tradition, there can be no Sky-Going gesture, no new authentic way of being in the world, without the body. Rather than an abstract cognition of Being, recollection is the retrieval of a concrete and deep bodily felt sense of Being, already waiting as the secret Other to be touched and to touch.

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Soteriology of the Senses in Tibetan Buddhism*

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Abstract

In Tibet, certain categories of Buddhist sacra are ascribed the power to liberate through sensory contact. No less than “buddhahood without meditation” is promised, offering an expedient means to salvation that seemingly obviates the need for a rigorous regime of ethical, contemplative, and intellectual training. This article investigates two such categories of sacra, substances that “liberate through tasting” and images that “liberate through seeing” as found in a mode of revelation particular to Tibet and culturally related areas, in which scriptures and sacred objects are reportedly embedded in the landscape as *terma* or “treasures” (*gter ma*). The author argues that charisma invested in these substances and images — through an amalgamation of relics and special means of consecration — provides the grounds for the soteriological benefits claimed as a result of sensory contact with them. The question is whether these benefits suggest a notion of grace in Tibetan Buddhism, and if so how it might contravene without contradicting the law of karma. Exploring this question sheds light on the role of the senses and the nature of Buddhist soteriology as it developed in Tibet.

Keywords

charisma, senses, Tibetan Buddhism, *terma*, relics, grace

Among the wide range of benefits promised by sensory contact with Buddhist sacra in Tibet, the grandest claim of all is to liberate merely by seeing, hearing, tasting, wearing, or otherwise encountering certain

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types of texts, objects, and structures. Note the following benefits to be derived from ingesting a special type of ritually consecrated pill:

Beings of the six realms, whether old or young, male or female, virtuous or evil, regardless of [their] good or bad tendencies, [attain] buddhahood by eating this. It works even when reaching one's last breath! By eating this very pill, because one need not read texts, the blind, though ingestion, [can attain] buddhahood. Likewise for the deaf, since one need not rely on hearing. Even if the body is crippled, this pill frees one from the dangerous pathway [leading] to the three lower realms. For any sentient being whatsoever, despite committing [one of] the inexpiable sins or accumulating evil deeds, suffering is pacified and bliss is attained.... What's more, by this pill, the mere size of deer droppings, one is born into the pure land of Avalokiteśvara, the supreme place to practice.¹

This passage is striking in its suggestion that the simple act of eating a pill can save beings from the karmic consequences of their own negative deeds. Any and all are included, even the greatest sinner and those whose faculties might hinder their access to receiving Buddhist teachings. This pill promises no less than to “liberate through tasting” (*myong grol*), and its soteriological benefits range from blocking rebirth in the lower realms — as an animal, hungry ghost or denizen of hell — to buddhahood itself. Moreover, the culminating benefit listed is rebirth in the pure land of Avalokiteśvara, from which point salvation is by and large secured.² How should we understand such claims within the overall framework of Buddhist soteriology? What do these claims suggest about the role of senses in Tibetan Buddhism?

The promise of expedient means to salvation through the senses is nothing new in Buddhism by the time it reached Tibet (seventh to ninth centuries). Outside of esoteric spheres, this took shape in devotional activities — such as hearing, reciting, copying, preserving, or venerating a scripture — accompanied in various Mahāyāna *sūtras*,

¹ Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 7:506.6–507.6, echoing a shorter statement in vol. 2:680.6–681.3. Elsewhere in his corpus of revelations, these pills are specified to be the size of droppings (*ril ma*) belonging to a small rodent (*bra ba*) common in Tibetan grasslands and mountainous areas, most likely a pika. See vol. 2:677.4 and 681.2.

² Kapstein 2004 calls this a “pure land orientation” in Tibetan Buddhism.

such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* and *Kāraṇḍavyūha*, by a generic list of benefits including rebirth in Amitābha's pure land of Sukhāvatī.³ Moreover, the *Kāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* promises, for example, that “by merely seeing” (*darśanamātreṇa*) one who bestows the six syllable formula of Avalokiteśvara, *Oṃ Maṇipadme Hūṃ*, men, women, children and even animals will become “last-existence” bodhisattavas (Sanskrit: *caramabhavikā*), freed from the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death (Studholme 2002:141). By the thirteenth century, this logic had been extended by Guru Chöwang, who vigorously promoted the cult of Avalokiteśvara and the benefits from encountering this bodhisattva's mantra, perhaps the most widely recited by Tibetans still today. In his *Maṇi Kabum Chenmo*, the mantra (in its seven syllable form) is promoted as an expedient means toward salvation by seeing, hearing, recollecting, touching, writing, holding, practicing, reciting, and/or explaining it. According to Guru Chöwang, not only should the mantra be erected at crossroads for all to see and proclaimed so that animals can hear it, but even contact with the mantra by drinking the water that washed over it (for example, when carved in stone) leads to rebirth in Sukhāvatī (Phillips 2004:188–90).⁴

While the senses are touted as a means to salvation in Mahāyāna literature alongside other devotional activities, the promise of liberation through sensory contact crystallized into particular categories of sacred texts and objects in Tibet and culturally related areas.⁵ A well-known example is *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, whose Tibetan title

³ I use “devotional activities” to mean those acts of veneration geared toward earning merit, following Schopen's characterization of “a context the defining poles of which are *pūjā* (worship, cult) and *punya* (merit)” (1977:189). Schopen argues that rebirth in the pure land of Sukhāvatī is “one of a list of stock blessings” (180) to be derived from this type of activity (180). See Gomez on hearing the name of the buddha Amitābha as a salvific act in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra* (1996:26 and 71–75).

⁴ The section on the benefits of touching Avalokiteśvara's mantra, from which this final example is drawn, can be found in Chos kyi dbang phyug 1976:505.2–506.4.

⁵ Areas where Tibetan Buddhism has historically been practiced extend across the Tibetan plateau and into Himalayan areas such as Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, and high alpine regions of Nepal, including Mustang, Dolpo, and Solu-Khumbu. For the duration of this article, I will simply use “Tibet” in order to avoid the cumbersome addition of qualifiers, and by this I refer to the so-called “three districts of Tibet” (*bod chol ka gsum*): central Tibet as well as Kham and Amdo to the east.

translates as *Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State* (*Bar do thos grol*); it provides guidance through the intermediate state between death and rebirth, often read aloud at the bedside of a corpse.⁶ A more common category, “liberation through wearing” (*btags grol*), refers to amulets containing verbal formulas — such as mantras or *dhāraṇī* — wrapped in cloth and worn around the neck.⁷ The category of “liberation through tasting” (*myong grol*), by contrast, is applied to a range of sacred substances (*dam rdzas*),⁸ usually in the form of ritually-produced pills that are distributed by lamas on ritual occasions and in private audiences, also sometimes available for sale at monasteries.⁹ With per-

⁶ The *Bar do thos grol* is a revelation by Karma Lingpa, part of his widely-disseminated cycle of peaceful and wrathful deities, *Zab chos zhi khro dgongs pa rang grol*. A number of translations are available, including those by W.Y. Evanz-Wentz, Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa, Robert Thurman, and most recently Gyurme Dorje. For a historical study of the *Bar do thos grol* and its transmission, see Cuevas 2003, and for its reception among Western audiences, see Lopez 1998.

⁷ These are also said to be worn in topknot of yogins and placed on the chest of a corpse when cremated (Cuevas 2003). Of course, *dhāraṇīs* are an important site for claims to expedient means of salvation, not only through their recitation and recollection, but also through seeing and hearing. See Scherrer-Schaub 1994 for an example of *dhāraṇī* among Dunhuang manuscripts that claim to be “means of rescue” (*skyob pa'i thabs*) from being reborn in hell through being seen and heard.

⁸ The *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Krang dbyi sun 1993) gives the etymology for *dam rdzas* as *dam tshig gi rdzas*, referring to “samaya substances,” and defines it as “material objects that have been blessed through mantra” (*sngags kyis byin gyis brlabs pa'i dngos po*). I have chosen to translate the term more generically as “sacred substance” to reflect this consecrated status. In a similar vein, Martin 1994 translates the term as “consecrated substances.”

⁹ There are a wide variety of categories of ritually-produce pills, which at a certain point get collapsed, such that today at Mindroling Monastery outside of Lhasa you can purchase pills considered to be “sacred substances that liberate through tasting” (*dam rdzas myong grol*) as well as an “elixir” (*bdud rtsi*) and “religious medicine” (*chos sman*), bearing the label: *Dam rdzas myong grol bdud rtsi chos sman*. Less typically, I have encountered the term “liberation through tasting” applied to a vase containing “water of accomplishment” (*sgrub chu*) housed at Shalu monastery near Shigatse and taken from a site where the Indian master Atiśa is said to have meditated. The term *sgrub chu* refers to water springing from a cave or other site where a tantric master has meditated, understood to contain the blessings of his or her accomplishment. Its ingestion constitutes part of a broader tendency among Tibetans to gather materials from pilgrimage sites as “portable sources of a site’s power to be directly consumed, or carried off for later use and further distribution” (Huber 1999:15).

haps the widest range of application, “liberation through seeing” (*mthong grol*) made an early appearance in the fourteenth century as “natural liberation through naked insight” (*gcer mthong rang grol*), whereby “seeing” refers to insight into the nature of reality.¹⁰ However, the term is more frequently found in the context of pilgrimage to denote specific types of images and the structures that house them, as well as *stūpas* containing the relics of accomplished masters.¹¹ I have also seen “liberation through seeing” applied to a laminated image of Avalokiteśvara, photographs of Buddhist lineage holders, and even a VCD depicting the religious activities of a Nyingma lama.¹²

This phenomenon developed into groupings of “four liberations” (*grol ba bzhi*) or alternatively “six liberations” (*grol ba drug*), though there is little consensus regarding the constituent categories. Two commonplace sets of four are sometimes collapsed into six, namely liberation through seeing, hearing, tasting, wearing, recollecting and touching.¹³ Reference to smell (*dri*) or the more generic category of

¹⁰ This term occurs in the context of the introduction to awareness (*rig pa ngo sprod*). There are two translations of Karme Lingpa’s *Rig pa ngo sprod gcer mthong rang grol*, in Reynolds 2000 and Gyurme Dorje 2006.

¹¹ The use of this term in reference to structures housing sacra or relics such as *stūpas*, temples, and assembly halls can be found in the names of the structures themselves and in titles for the catalogues that list their contents. In recent years, the Tibetan diaspora has led to the construction and consecration of “great *stūpas* that naturally liberate upon seeing” (*mcchod rten chen mo mthong bar rang grol*) as far apart as Dehradun, India and the Rocky Mountains of Colorado.

¹² I have seen a laminated image of Avalokiteśvara for sale in Lhasa, labeled as *mthong grol* and listing a host of benefits on its back side, including rebirth in Sukhāvātī. Moreover, formal portraits of the two main lineage holders of the Drikung Kagyu, currently on display at Songtsen Library in Dehradun, are termed “precious photographs that liberate through seeing” (*sku par mthong grol rin po che*). Finally, a VCD of the tertön Tulku Jigme Phuntsok (husband of Khandro Tāre Lhamo, 1938–2002) bears the title: “A Compilation of Deeds that Naturally Liberates Those Who Witness It” (*mdzad bsdus mthong tshad rang grol*).

¹³ Textual sources tend to deal exclusively with one or another of these and may mention different groupings of other senses in passing. While the rubric of the “six liberations” is in common parlance among contemporary lamas, I have so far only found groupings of four in textual sources. Moreover, there is significant variation regarding the constituency of these four, though two common sets are: “liberation through seeing, hearing, recollecting, and touching” (*mthong thos dran reg grol*) and

feeling (*tshor*) are less frequently found. Of these, this article will treat substances that promise to “liberate through tasting” and images that promise to “liberate through seeing” as found in a mode of revelation particular to Tibet and culturally related areas in which traces of the past are said to be discovered in the landscape as *terma* or “treasures” (*gter ma*).¹⁴ Purported to be hidden away for future generations by the eighth-century tantric master Padmasambhava (and other comparable figures),¹⁵ these treasures can be texts, relics, images, ritual implements, medicinal pills and more.¹⁶

“liberation through seeing, hearing, tasting, and wearing” (*mthong thos myong btags grol*). There is also a distinct esoteric grouping of liberations particular to Dzogchen or the “great perfection” (*rdzogs chen*); however, it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into these. One important distinction to make is that the esoteric version constitutes part of a meditative system in which their liberating effect is understood to be immediate, whereas the categories treated in this article have more to do with devotional activities whereby the soteriological promise to a large extent relates to future lifetimes. One site where this distinction collapses is death rituals in which meditative insight and a favorable rebirth may be equally pressing and immediate concerns. In contrast to the groupings above, Tulku Thondup lists a set of five liberations: diagrams (*khor lo*) that liberate through seeing, mantras (*gzungs sngags*) that liberate through hearing, ambrosia or elixir (*bdud rtsi*) that liberates through tasting, a consort (*phyag rgya*) who liberates through touching, and transference (*pho ba*) that liberates through thinking (1997:242, n. 152).

¹⁴ For seminal studies on the treasure tradition, see Tulku Thondup 1997 and Janet Gyatso 1986 and 1993. Within Tibetan Buddhism, treasure revelation is primarily associated with the Nyingma school, though treasures have been revealed on a more sporadic basis by prominent members of all schools (Smith 2001:239–40). Moreover, the Bön religion in Tibet has its own substantial tradition of treasure revelation; see Martin 2001 and Karmay 1972. While treasure literature has received considerable scholarly attention, the material dimension of this mode of revelation has yet to be adequately explored. See my “Ontology of the Past and its Materialization in Tibetan Treasures” (forthcoming).

¹⁵ Gyatso 1993:98, n. 2 and Doctor 2005:198, n. 14 list the names of other such masters. On the role of Padmasambhava — both historical and mythic — in the propagation of Buddhism in Tibet, see Kapstein 2000:155–160.

¹⁶ Treasures purportedly revealed from the landscape are called “earth treasures” (*sa gter*) and typically consist of a treasure casket (*gter sgrom*), containing texts preserved in seminal form on yellow scrolls (*shog ser*) as well as relics and other sacra. Each treasure is said to have been entrusted by Padmasambhava to one of his disciples for discovery in a future lifetime. For an overview of typologies of treasures, see Doctor 2005.

In this article, I examine how charisma is invested in such objects, what benefits are claimed for sensory contact with them, and the implications of this for our understanding of Buddhist soteriology. Here I am using charisma following Stanley Tambiah in his study of Buddhist saints and the “transfer of charisma to objects” such as amulets and images. Tambiah makes the point that “objects are not merely regarded as reminders and fields of merit, but also as repositories of ‘power’” (Tambiah 1984:6, 203). While images serve as a reminder of the Buddha and the basis for making offerings in order to earn merit, Tambiah’s point is that they are also understood to be efficacious in some regard, due to a power invested in them through their origins and/or sanctification. In the context of Thai image veneration, this power is said to be the “fiery energy” of *tejas*,¹⁷ which emanates from the Buddha’s virtues and realization. By contrast, in Tibetan contexts, Buddhist sacra are understood to be receptacles (*rten*) for *chinlab* or “blessings” (Sanskrit: *adhiṣṭhāna*; Tibetan: *byin rlabs*),¹⁸ invested in an object by virtue of physical contiguity with Buddhist saints or through its consecration. *Chinlab* carries associations of royal power as “splendor” or “majesty” and denotes an ability to influence or transform the attitude and perceptions of others.¹⁹ Though the function of blessings has a

¹⁷ Tambiah follows Griswold by describing this power as a “fiery energy” (*tejas*) in the Thai context. See Tambiah 1984:203–4 and Griswold 1990. I would like to thank Donald Swearer for an illuminating exchange regarding the Thai application of the terms, *tejas* and *adhiṣṭhāna* (Pali: *teja* and *adhiṭṭhāna*).

¹⁸ According to Martin, there are three main classifications of *rten*: “body receptacles” (*sku rten*) referring to images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, tantric deities and saints, “speech receptacles” (*gsung rten*) referring to sacred texts, and “thought receptacles” (*thugs rten*) referring primarily to stūpas containing relics of accomplished masters (1994:275). These are also considered to be receptacles for blessings (*byin rten* or *byin rlabs kyi rten*).

¹⁹ Stein offers evidence for the royal associations of *byin* but suggests an ambiguity about whether archaic terms retained their previous meaning when subsumed into new Buddhist binomes — in this case *byin rlabs* which he defines as benediction (Stein 1983:197–200). Elsewhere he correlates *byin rlabs*, *gzi byin* and *gzi brjid* in non-Buddhist sources as equivalents meaning “majesty, prestige, charisma” (164). The *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* (Krang dbyi sun 1993) defines *byin* as “a potency or power that is able to transform the attitude and perceptions of others” (*gzhan gyi bsam pa dang snang ba sogs bsgyur thub pa’i nus pa’am mthu*), *rlabs* as “a degree of potency and force” (*nus*

wider application in tantric ritual and warrants further study, for our purposes, we could characterize it as a potency or power localized in a sacred object that is understood to transform its immediate environment and those who come into direct contact with it. As I hope to demonstrate, blessings are understood to have an apotropaic effect, conferring worldly benefits (such as protection from illness, obstacles and malignant spirits), as well as a soteriological effect, geared toward salvation in subsequent rebirths or alternatively release from cyclic existence, or *saṃsāra*, altogether. Thus, in the Tibetan case, the power attributed to Buddhist sacra goes beyond the “this-worldly” efficacy discussed by Tambiah and into the domain of soteriology.

I introduce the term, *soteriology of the senses*, to denote a notion articulated in treasure literature that certain objects are so highly charged with blessings that sensory contact with them promises salvation in one of three forms: its proximate form of a favorable rebirth; its ultimate form of buddhahood; or a synthesis of the two, namely rebirth in a Buddhist pure land.²⁰ The latter constitutes a favorable rebirth and is

pa dang mthu stobs kyi tshad) though it can also simply mean “wave,” and *byin rlabs* as “a potency or power that resides in those religious objects [pertaining to] the noble path” (*phags pa'i lam chos kyi don gang yin pa la gnas pa'i nus pa'am mthu*). Dungkar Rinpoche concurs on *byin* as power (*nus pa*) within the term *byin rlabs* but suggests that the influence of *byin rlabs* can be positive or negative (Dungkar 2002:1487). Martin suggests an etymology for *byin rlabs* as “received by (way of) giving” (1994:274) choosing to take *byin* as the past tense of the verb *shyin pa* (to give). However, this etymology misses the association of *byin rlabs* with power — one of the meanings of *adhiṣṭhāna* in Sanskrit as well — and fails to capture the agency and directionality of *byin rlabs*, which is not a receptive capacity but an active force that operates on its environment and those who encounter it.

²⁰ Here I follow the definition of Buddhist soteriology as developed in Spiro 1982. Spiro has two categories: proximate salvation, related to karma and improving one's prospects of a favorable rebirth (his kammatic orientation), and radical (what I am calling ultimate) salvation, pertaining to transcendence of worldly suffering in *saṃsāra* altogether (his nibbanic orientation). Note that a favorable rebirth here refers to rebirth *within* the cycle of *saṃsāra* in one of the higher realms as a god, demigod, or human and thereby avoiding rebirth as an animal, hungry ghost, or denizen of hell. To this must be added a third category, a pure land orientation, not relevant to Theravāda context in which Spiro developed his schema, but which figures prominently in East Asia. Though only so far examined in Kapstein 2004, this pure land orientation also exists in Tibetan Buddhism, albeit not as a separate school.

also understood to offer the ideal conditions in which to complete the path to enlightenment. If the ingestion of sacred substances, for example, offers not only the medicinal effects of a temporal panacea but also the soteriological promise of rebirth in a pure land and even buddhahood, then to what extent does this imply the possibility of salvation through grace in Tibetan Buddhism? Grace faces the same problem that the transfer of merit does, described by Melford Spiro long ago as a “vexatious problem for the metaphysics of karma” since “according to karmic law, retribution for one’s acts devolves exclusively on the actor” (Spiro 1982:124).²¹ As we will see in the following, sensory contact with certain categories of sacra are credited with the power to tip the karmic scale, thereby sparing individuals the results of their own vices and enabling even the worst of sinners to gain a favorable rebirth. As such, the four (or six) liberations raise important questions about the role of the senses and about the very nature of salvation in Buddhism as it developed in Tibet.

Because of the diverse range of apotropaic and soteriological claims made regarding sensory contact with certain texts, images, substances, mantras and structures in Tibetan Buddhism, one has to be quite careful about generalizations at this early stage of research.²² A narrowly-focused

²¹ With reference to versions of the *Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra*, Gomez poses this as a tension between the “ideals of self-cultivation” and “trust in the Buddha’s grace” (1996:28). Harrison draws a similar contrast between “a tradition of self-emancipation through insight” (which he associates with Chan masters) and “a tradition of salvation by faith in the grace and power of certain personifications of the Buddha-principle” (associated with Pure Land schools of Buddhism in East Asia). However, he argues that during the formative centuries of the Mahāyāna there is “little sense of mutual opposition of ‘faith’ and ‘works’ which is evident, for instance, both in Christian writings at the time of the birth of Protestantism and the polemics of later Japanese Pure Land masters” (Harrison 1978:35).

²² To date, there is only one article treating this phenomenon, Tokarska-Bakir 2000, which presents a broad overview of different types of sacra that promise liberation through sensory contact, discussed in comparison with European conceptions about the role of the senses in religious experience. Unfortunately, Tokarska-Bakir fails to consult primary sources, except those few that are available in translation. Because of this, for example, she mistakenly takes “liberation through wearing” (*btags grol*) a category dating back at least to the fourteenth century where it appears in several treasure collections (*Snying thig ya bzhi*, *Bla ma dgongs ’dus*, and *Kar gling zhi khro*) to be a subclass of “liberation through touching,” which is rarely discernable as a separate

study will allow us to identify a coherent soteriology and lay the foundation for further research, and so I will restrict myself here to a comparison of two specific types of treasure objects. The first is a substance said to “liberate through tasting,” called *kyedun*, a pill purportedly made from the flesh of one born “seven times” (*skye bdun*) a brahmin but which became transformed in treasure lore into the flesh of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion whose special domain is said to be Tibet. And the second is a type of image promising to “liberate through seeing,” called a *kutsab* or “representative” (*sku tshab*) of the eight-century tantric master Padmasambhava, who is credited in treasure lore with a seminal role in propagating Buddhism in Tibet. Both these types of treasure objects constitute a narrow and somewhat rarified subset of a broader category, for *kyedun*, liberation through tasting and, for *kutsab*, liberation through seeing. However, the phenomena they represent — namely liberation through seeing, hearing, tasting, wearing, etc. — is widespread and today can be commonly encountered in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. By examining categories that make the grandest claims for the role of the senses, we can learn more generally about the rationale behind the range of benefits attributed to sensory contact with Buddhist sacra.

category in the collections that I have so far consulted. She makes this mistake in part because of her insistence on the term, “liberation through the senses,” for which she neither gives a Tibetan equivalent nor defines as her own. Thus she struggles in vain to find a “sense” with which to correlate liberation through wearing, incorrectly asserting it to be a subset of touch and even more strangely of smell. The article also contains minor errors that ethnographic research could have addressed, such as the assertion that liberation through wearing is “almost exclusively meant for the dead” (77–78) though it is commonplace for Tibetans to wear this and other classes of amulets around the neck. She concludes by describing “liberation through the senses” as means for the “radical disappearance of the subject” in which “all the traces of subjective-objective distance are gone” (111–12), an assessment that may accord with philosophical understandings of liberation in Tibetan Buddhism but is not evident in relation to the devotional practices in which liberation through seeing, hearing, tasting, wearing, etc. are commonly found. For the categories under consideration here, her conclusions do not mesh with the types of liberation promised, the rationale behind benefits claimed for sensory contact with Buddhist sacra, or the logic of devotional activities in which this contact routinely occurs.

My sources for this study are a cluster of texts from the collected works (*gsung 'bum*) and treasure collection (*gter chos*) of tertöns or “treasure revealers” (*gter ston*) and their disciples within the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism.²³ These texts span various genres,²⁴ including catalogues (*dkar chag*), histories (*lo rgyus*), and medicine-making rituals (*sman sgrub*) that recount the origins of sacra and contain statements that describe the benefits (*phan yon*) of sensory contact with them. Such benefit statements can be found in a wide range of literary sources and also circulate on the ground in a variety of ways: recounted during rituals, posted at pilgrimage sites, and even printed for distribution on the back of amulets, postcards and laminated images. These constitute a valuable and overlooked source for understanding the rationale for modes of Buddhist practice, since they articulate an applied understanding what is to be gained by performing a particular ritual, encountering a sacred object, or visiting a pilgrimage site.

Strikingly, texts that discuss the origins and benefits of *kyedun* and *kutsab* have little to say about the aesthetics of taste and sight. Though *kyedun* promises to “liberate through tasting,” there is no mention of its flavor, and the act of tasting seems less important than ingestion as a means to internalize blessings. Similarly, the beauty of a *kutsab* is not the focus of discussion, nor is its form (luster, proportion, artistry) what gives these images their power to “liberate through seeing.” What we find instead is an emphasis on the amalgamation of relics contained in such objects and their special means of consecration, which together form the basis for the range of benefits promised by sensory contact with them. In the first half of what follows, I chart the multiple ways that charisma is invested in *kyedun* and *kutsab*, serving as the basis for claims to their high degree of potency and corresponding efficacy. And in the second half, I consider whether their promise to liberate through sensory contact should be considered a free and unearned gift of grace.

²³ See Gayley 2003 for a discussion of the tertön as a category of Buddhist saint.

²⁴ See Martin 1996 on the genre *dkar chag* and Vostrikov 1970 and van der Kuijp 1996 for a survey and analysis of different genres of historical writing in Tibetan literature. In its usage within the treasure tradition, *lo rgyus* commonly provides the lore surrounding the origins of a treasure, whether a ritual cycle or sacred object.

Kyedun as Bodhisattva Flesh

Substances said to liberate through tasting are hailed as “most excellent in the power of their wondrous blessings” (Gter bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:130b.5).²⁵ Ingesting them is touted as a “short cut, the path to buddhahood without meditation” (*ma bsgoms sangs rgyas lam gyi nye lam*, *ibid.* vol. 11:131a.4). A significant locus for the claim to liberate through tasting is a type of ritually-made pill, called *kyedun*, or literally “seven births” (*skye bdun*), because they are purported to be made out of the flesh of one born seven times as a brahmin. In a thirteenth-century history of treasure revelation by Guru Chöwang, *kyedun* is listed as an arcane ritual substance.²⁶ However, by the fifteenth century, in the treasure corpus of the Bhutanese tertön Pema Lingpa,²⁷ the flesh of one born seven times a brahmin has been transformed into the flesh of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara said to emanate as two (or sometimes three) brahmins. This signals a shift from an alchemical register, whereby eating the flesh of a brahmin is associated with the power of flight in Indian tantras, such as *Hevajratantra*, to a charismatic register whereby the emanated flesh of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara is regarded to be a repository of merit and blessings.²⁸

²⁵ The Tibetan reads: *ngo mtshar byin rlabs nus pa khyad par 'phags*.

²⁶ See Chos kyi dbang phyug 1975:81, also studied in Gyatso 1994. Elsewhere definitions of *kyedun* as the flesh of a boy born seven times to a royal family or seven times as a bodhisattva are attributed to Guru Chöwang. See *Bdud rtsi sman sgrub kyi las tshogs* in Byams mgon kong sprul 1976, vol. 48:205–27, derived from his cycle, *Bka' brgyad gsang ba yongs rdzogs*.

²⁷ There are several texts in Padma gling pa 1975 which I draw on for this study. These include: “Sādhana of Kyedun Flesh” (*Skype bdun sha'i sgrub pa*, vol. 2:675–79); “Meaningful to Behold: History of the Sacred Substance, Kyedun Pills” (*Dam rdzas skype bdun ril bu'i lo rgyus mthong ba don ldan*, vol. 7:489–92); “The Benefits of Kyedun Flesh” (*Skype bdun sha'i phan yon*, vol. 2:679–81); “The Procedure for Preparing Kyedun” (*Skype bdun sbyar thabs kyi phyag bzhes*, vol. 7:493–99); and “Meaningful to Behold: A History of Kyedun” (*Skype bdun lo rgyus mthong ba don ldan*, vol. 7:501–8). The first two, considered to be treasure revelations, are narrated in the first person voice of Padmasambhava. The third is considered to be an ordinary composition by Pema Lingpa, and the latter two are compositions by his disciples, Nangso Döndrup and Ngödrup respectively.

²⁸ This point is made explicitly in the writings of Nyingma apologist Sodokpa Lodrö Gyaltsen, who distinguishes *kyedun* as described in tantras such as *Hevajratantra*

In an interesting twist on the term, *kyedun*, these pills no longer claim to contain the flesh of one born seven times a brahmin; rather, they promise the individual who ingests them the possibility of liberation within seven lifetimes. Regarding its soteriological promise, one treasure text in Pema Lingpa's corpus, framed as a dialogue between Padmasambhava and his Tibetan consort and disciple Yeshe Tsogyal, contains a wonderful play on words. Note the use of *kyedun* or "seven lifetimes" in the following statement in the first-person voice of Padmasambhava:

If ingested, after taking birth in a body endowed with qualities for seven lifetimes, one will attain the state of a *vidyādhara* and ultimately meet with me, Padmasambhava, in person.... Those unable [to practice] the dharma, exert yourselves in this sacred substance. (Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 7:491.1–2)²⁹

The notion of seven lifetimes is preserved but the valences of *kyedun* have changed. It no longer refers to the substances that are ingested but rather to the soteriological promise of their ingestion. Indeed, in this passage, *kyedun* offers the prospect of seven lifetimes in a "body endowed with qualities" after which time realization is achieved. This almost certainly refers to a human body that is free and well-favored (*dal'byor mi lus*), possessing the conditions necessary to pursue spiritual practice.

The soteriological promise of these pills derives to a large extent from their alleged ingredients, first and foremost, the flesh of the

from *kyedun* revealed as treasures (*gter gyi skye bdun*), said to contain brahmin flesh emanated by Avalokiteśvara as well as relics from eighth-century tantric masters, both Indian and Tibetan. See Sog bzlog pa 1975, vol. 2:448.1–2 and 450.1.

²⁹ A catalogue in Chokgyur Lingpa's corpus also employs the trope of seven lifetimes in stating the promise of *kyedun*. In the first person voice of Padmasambhava, it states that *kyedun* pills are made "in order to effortlessly liberate the faithful in the future — all who see, hear, recollect or touch [them] — after seven lifetimes" (*ma'ongs dad ldan mthong thos dran reg kun/ skye ba bdun nas 'bad med grol ba'i phyir*, Mchog gyur gling pa 1982–86, vol. 29:379:3). As an anomaly vis-à-vis other texts examined here, in this case, the base material is emanated by Padmasambhava through the powers of his meditation. As another variation on the valence of "seven births," Sodokpa lists seven brahmins emanated by Avalokiteśvara whose flesh serves as the basis for *kyedun* within the treasure tradition (Sog bzlog pa 1975, vol. 2:448.2–3).

bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, or more specifically, brahmin flesh that has become “reencoded” as the flesh of Avalokiteśvara who is said to emanate as brahmins in order to establish beings in a state of buddhahood.³⁰ As the story goes, Avalokiteśvara’s flesh is found by the Indian princess Mandāravā and offered to Padmasambhava (referred to below as Uḍḍiyāṇa Padmākara), who then brings it to Tibet and fashions pills. The following account is given by Pema Lingpa:

The Great Compassionate One, the noble Avalokiteśvara, in order to establish all beings in saṃsāra as buddhas, sent forth an emanation to tame anyone in whatever way necessary and thus performed the benefit of beings. In the region of Zahor in India, [he generated] physical emanations as the brahmins Vimalahṛdaya and Puṇḍarīka. Furthermore, in the region of the King Vihāradhara, [the flesh? of these brahmins] was found by Mandāravā, an emanation of Sarasvatī, who took [it] to her delighted father. Blazing with inner experience and realization, the maiden offered [it] to her father as a means of beseeching. At the time of performing prayers, she took Uḍḍiyāṇa Padmākara as her guru and offered [it] to him. Uḍḍiyāṇa Padmākara conveyed [it] to Tibet and made pills from brahmin flesh, red and white *bodhicitta*, elixir and the flesh of *vidyādhara*s and *mahāsiddha*s. He hid these pills as treasures for the benefit of beings in the Snowy Land [Tibet], to be revealed by a succession of appointed tertöns. (Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 2:680.1–6)

In this reworking of the *kyedun* myth,³¹ Avalokiteśvara’s flesh becomes available through the intervention of Padmasambhava, who transports it to Tibet and conceals it for the future.³² The mediation of Padmasambhava distances *kyedun* pills from the antinomian dimensions of procuring brahmin flesh, though it is ambiguous in the above account

³⁰ I borrow the concept of “reencoding” from David Gray 2005, who uses it to refer to semantic shifts in the adaptation between tantric systems, particularly the domestication of transgressive practices.

³¹ Sodokpa contrasts the lore of *kyedun* in the treasure tradition (as above) with a different version of the story whereby *kyedun* is associated with the power of flight. See his “Catalogue that Establishes how Pills that Liberate through Tasting are Based on the Flesh of One Born Seven Times a Brahmin” (*Bram ze skye ba bdun pa’i sha la brten pa’i myong grol ril bu ji lta bar bskrun pa’i dkar chag*) in Sog bzlog pa 1975, vol. 2:443–58.

³² The cults of Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava overlap in important ways in the treasure tradition, in which the two form a trinity with the buddha Amitābha as his *saṃbhogakāya* and *nirmāṇakāya* manifestations, respectively.

whether Mandāravā offers him living brahmins or their flesh. This ambiguity is cleared up in an account offered by a disciple of Pema Lingpa in which Mandāravā stumbles upon the flesh of an eight year old boy (understood to be a brahmin) when she goes to the marketplace, abandoned the morning after a torrential rainstorm, and finds no other meat available (Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 7:504.1–2).

Significantly, the above account was given during a ritual consecrating a batch of *kyedun*, suggesting that *kyedun* revealed as treasures have been used to supply the relics for batches of pills made publicly in a ritual context. When ritually produced, the base material for these pills contain assorted ingredients, including ground mutton, grains, sweets, milk, spring water as well as other medicinal and precious substances.³³ To this is then added a catalyst (*phabs*), a “mother” (*a ma*) pill if available and otherwise a previously consecrated *kyedun* pill (Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 7:495:4). This goes along with Dan Martin’s suggestion that substances were “consecrated by minute, and probably extremely minute traces of relics added to the ‘brew’ through the centuries of consecration rites” such that relics function as “a genuine starter (*phabrgyun* as in ‘yeast starter’ for making beer or yoghurt)” (Martin 1994:301).³⁴ Since any fraction of a relic contains the potency of the whole, minute traces can be used to consecrate new batches of pills, distributing the sanctity of one into many. In another example of this principle, *kyedun* are understood to sometimes magically multiply (Gter bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:131.5; Mchog gyur gling pa 1982–86, vol. 29:380.1–2).

³³ According to “The Procedure for Preparing Kyedun” (*Skye bdun sbyar thabs kyi phyag bzhes*), the first stage of making *kyedun* involves the procurement of a female sheep’s vital organs to be placed in a stone vessel and ground into a fine powder or paste. Next, in a metal or clay pot, this is to be mixed with the following ingredients: water gathered from a spring, snow (mountain), lake and marketplace; milk collected from cow, *bri* (female counterpart to a yak), *dzo mo* (i.e. *mdzo*, a cross between a yak and cow) and sheep; flour of various grains such as barley, wheat, rice and sesame; various precious metals such as gold, silver, and copper; the powder of various medicinal ingredients; and in spring, the extract of flowers and in winter, the power of dried flowers. See Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 7:494.3–495.4.

³⁴ Sodokpa mentions a catalyst containing the blessings of lineage forefathers (*gong ma’i byin brlabs phabs rgyun*) but it is not clear if he is referring to the relics contained in *kyedun* pills or the pills themselves (Sog bzlog pa 1975, vol. 2:458.1).

Compounding their sanctity, *kyedun* pills are also reported to contain an amalgamation of relics of accomplished masters, ranked as *vidyādhara*s (knowledge holders) and *mahāsiddha*s (accomplished ones). In one history in Pema Lingpa's corpus, we find the names of specific eighth-century saints from India and Tibet whose relics are enumerated as the source for "kyedun endowed with blessings" (*byin rlabs can gyi skye bdun*, Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 7:489.5–490.4). These figures, such as Garab Dorje (*Prahevajra), Mañjuśrimitra, Sangye Yeshe, Namkai Nyingpo, Yeshe Tsogyal, and Vairocana, play in an important role in the Nyingma understanding of its historical roots. And due to the amalgamation of their relics, *kyedun* pills offer a means to receive blessings from seminal lineage figures and to establish a connection to the lineage as a whole. The tendency to amalgamate relics in *kyedun* can also be found in lists of base materials used to produce these pills, which can include substances revealed by successive tertöns and the relics of tertöns themselves (ibid. vol. 7:504:5–505:5).³⁵ Still today, sacred substances claiming to "liberate through tasting" attribute the blessings contained therein to the addition of a catalyst associated with saints of yore as their relics, as treasures revealed by them, or as pills consecrated by them. For example, one of the various types of pills available for sale at Mindroling Monastery outside of Lhasa bears the label: "sacred substances that liberate through tasting, containing a catalyst that combines the blessed substances of various accomplished saints of India and Tibet."³⁶

Kyedun are further sanctified through the consecration process in which the pills are transmuted into the body of Avalokiteśvara. The ritual preceptor performs a self-visualization as Avalokiteśvara in the

³⁵ There is also a sectarian inclusiveness to the substances listed, including relic pills from Sakya and Kagyu masters.

³⁶ This comes from the label on a package of pills that were produced at Mindroling during a ritual associated with the *Bka' brgyad bde gshegs' dus pa*. The label in full reads: 'Og min o rgyan smin grol gling du sgrub chen bka' brgyad bde 'dus gyi sgo nas bsgrubs pa'i 'phags bod skyes chen du ma'i byin rdzas phab ldan rten 'dus dam rdzas myong grol bzugs. Mindroling Monastery, founded in 1670 by Terdak Lingpa, lies a few kilometers off the road between Lhasa and Tsetang in Lhoka Prefecture.

form of the Great Compassionate One (*Thugs rje chen po*) and light emanating from a seed syllable at his heart center strikes a vase of freshly made pills in order to transform them. What follows is the visualization section of a *sādhana* or “means of accomplishment” for consecrating “flesh pills” (*sha ril*):

For the consecration, place [the pills] into a vase, seal [it] with ritual implements of the five buddha families along with ordinary rope, and place [it] at the center of a maṇḍala of the three roots. For the main section of the visualization, one instantly [arises in] in the form of the Great Compassionate One, red in color, with one face and two arms. In his right hand, he holds a lotus garland at the heart, and in his left, he holds a vase for ablutions. Jewel ornaments adorn his perfect body, and his head is ornamented by a perfect buddha. United with a secret wisdom consort, he is seated in cross-legged posture on a throne of a sun, moon, and lotus. On a moon disk at his heart center, a red HUM radiates light that strikes the vase of flesh pills and transforms [them] all into the Great Compassionate One. One should perform the emanation and gathering again and again. (Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 2:677.4–678.4)

In this ritual, which prescribes a mantra recitation over the course of seven days, Avalokiteśvara’s presence is explicitly evoked in order to consecrate the pills. Indeed, he presides over the consecration process in the form of the Great Compassionate One as the central deity of the self-visualization. Moreover, there are two important ways that *kyedun* are identified with his body. Not only are these pills said to contain flesh emanated by Avalokiteśvara, brought to Tibet by Padmsambhava and mixed with the relics of eighth-century masters, but the pills once fully formed are ritually transformed into an embodiment of Avalokiteśvara.

Given the purported ingredients of *kyedun* pills and their method of consecration, it should come as no surprise that one of the chief benefits promised by ingesting these pills is rebirth in the Avalokiteśvara’s pure realm, from which point forward salvation is by and large secured. This realm guarantees birth as one who has reached the end of saṃsāra (*‘khor ba mtha’ can skye*), and places one at the threshold of the path of awakening (*byang chub lam sna zin*). Regarding this articulation of pure land orientation, buddhahood itself is not bestowed but it is nonetheless guaranteed by rebirth into Avalokiteśvara’s pure land.

The soteriological promise of *kyedun* varies from text to text, even as the purported ingredients remain fairly consistent: pills of brahmin flesh emanated by Avalokiteśvara, mixed with relics, medicinal substances and other ingredients. In catalogues among the treasures of the influential seventeenth-century tertön,³⁷ Terdak Lingpa, for example, though Avalokiteśvara is cast as the source of *kyedun* flesh through his emanations as brahmins, there is no mention of rebirth in his pure land. Instead, freedom from the lower realms and the irreversibility of an individual's progress toward full liberation are stressed. In the first person voice of Padmasambhava, these texts explain that sacred substances are hidden as treasures for degenerate times (*snyigs ma'i dus*) in the future when few people practice the dharma and most engage in negative emotions, because of which they experience the suffering of the lower realms. The implication is that such dire circumstances require special means for salvation. *Kyedun* pills promise to provide “the finest allotment of merit” (*bsod nams skal ba mchog*) and “dredge the depths of saṃsāra” (*'khor ba dong sprugs*, Gter bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 12:95a.3–4). In other words, *kyedun* pills are intended to spare beings the sufferings of the lower realms and grant them an extra measure of merit, thereby enhancing their prospects for a favorable rebirth and expediting their progress toward buddhahood.

Though not articulating a pure land orientation per se, such statements nonetheless suggest quite clearly a notion of grace to the extent that individuals can be spared the karmic consequences of their own actions and granted merit accumulated by saints and bodhisattvas. Even the greatest of sinners — who has committed one of the five inexpiable sins — can expect to attain the blissful result (*bde 'bras*) in a future life as a god or human (Gter bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:131a.1–2).³⁸

³⁷ There are two catalogues dedicated to substances that liberate through tasting in the corpus of Terdak Lingpa (Gter bdag gling pa 1998): “A Catalogue of Great Bliss Pills that Liberate through Tasting” (*Myong grol bde chen ril bu'i dkar chag*, vol. 11:129a–131b) and “Dredging the Depths of Saṃsāra: A Catalogue of Sacred Substances that Liberate through Tasting” (*Dam rdzas myang grol gyi dkar chag 'khor ba dong sprugs*, vol. 12:94a–95b).

³⁸ The five inexpiable sins (*mtshams med lnga*) are a set of deeds considered so heinous that their retribution is immediate upon death; those who commit any one of them are understood to go immediately to hell without recourse or intervening period

While accounts differ in the specific soteriological effect promised, they agree on the rationale behind the efficacy of *kyedun*, based on the realization and merit of bodhisattvas and accomplished masters, made available to others in the form of blessings imbuing their flesh and relics.

Representatives of Padmasambhava

Turning now to our second category of treasure object, there is a special type of image considered to be a *kutsab* or “representative” (*sku tshab*) of Padmasambhava and credited with the power to “liberate through seeing” (*mtshong grol*).³⁹ A number of tertöns have discovered this type of image, said to be crafted and consecrated by Padmasambhava himself. Today, *kutsabs* revealed by Dorje Lingpa, Shikpo Lingpa and Terdak Lingpa are on display at Mindroling Monastery.⁴⁰ The term *kutsab* suggests that these images serve as a stand-in for Padmasambhava himself in contrast to more common terms for images, such as “likeness” (*sku 'dra*), which underscores the iconic aspect of images, and “support” (*sku rten*), which refers to their function as a locus for the presence of a buddha, bodhisattva, or tantric deity installed during the consecration process. Strikingly, as representatives, *kutsabs* are deemed to be equivalent to meeting Padmasambhava himself, considered by Tibetans to be a second buddha. One history proclaims: “For all who see, hear,

in the intermediate state or *bardo*. These five consist of matricide, patricide, killing an arhat, causing a schism in the saṅgha, or drawing blood from a tathāgata.

³⁹ *Kutsab* as a category does not refer exclusively to images of Padmasambhava revealed as treasures; for example, the revered Jowo image housed in the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa is considered to be a *kutsab* of Śākyamuni Buddha (Cameron Warner, personal communication).

⁴⁰ For my study of *kutsab* in this section, I rely primarily on two catalogues of images that liberate through seeing from Gter bdag gling pa 1998: “A Catalogue of Two Images that Liberate through Seeing” (*Mtshong grol sku rten gnyis kyi dkar chag*, vol. 11:124a–128b) and “The Wondrous Mirror: A Catalogue of Two Kutsab of the Guru” (*Gu ru'i sku tshab rnam gnyis kyi dkar chag ngo mtshar me long*, vol. 12:91a–93a). Images of *kutsab* discovered by a number of tertöns and other treasure objects can be found in Tulku Thondup 1997. See Shes bya and Dam chos bstan 'dzin 200? for photographs and descriptions of sacra at Mindroling Monastery including several *kutsab*.



Images on Display at Mindroling Monastery

A *kutsab* revealed by Shikpo Lingpa stands behind the central image (front) of the tertön Terdak Lingpa. It is flanked on either side by two *kutsabs* encased in amulet boxes, discovered by Terdak Lingpa (right) and Dorje Lingpa (left) respectively. (Photo: Holly Gayley.)

recollect or touch this supreme *kutsab*, it is no different from meeting Guru Padma” (Mchog gyur gling pa 1982–86, vol. 29:386.5–387.1).

This equivalence is emphasized in accounts of the origins of *kutsab*. Catalogues revealed by the seventeenth-century tertön Terdak Lingpa, for example, begin with Padmasambhava’s disciples bemoaning his immanent departure from Tibet and requesting that he leave a token of himself behind to serve as his successor (*zhal skyin*) — a representative (not representation) of Padmasambhava to receive supplications and offerings on his behalf. Padmasambhava’s disciples cry out: “When you depart, what will serve as the basis for supplications by the faithful among Tibetans? What field will they use for accumulating merit? For the benefit of us and Tibetan followers in the future, we request you to bless a receptacle for supplicating” (Gter bdag gling pa 1998,

vol. 12:91b.5–6). Here as elsewhere a *kutsab* is envisioned as a field of merit for offerings and vehicle for supplications to Padmasambhava, intended to serve as “a representative for the benefit of the faithful, who in the future will not meet the guru” (*ma ’ongs gu ru ma mjal dad ldan gyi don du sku tshab*, Mchog gyur gling pa 1982–86, vol. 29:387:1). However, a *kutsab* is not just a passive “object” of veneration; rather it is envisioned as a means by which Tibetans can come into contact with Padmasambhava and a vehicle through which his benevolent activity continues. Elsewhere a *kutsab* is proclaimed to be “the future regent (*rgyal tshab*) of the guru and tamer of beings, which remains as a support for [his] limitless activity, benefiting others by creating meaningful connections with karmically-endowed individuals” (ibid. vol. 29:386:2–3). Such statements emphasize Padmasambhava’s beneficent foresight on behalf of future generations as well as his enduring presence and power localized in this type of image.

For *kutsabs*, a number of factors contribute to their potency and soteriological effect: the materials used to fashion them, relics inserted into the cavity of these images, and their special means of consecration. Taken together, these factors “cumulatively contribute” to the exceptional sanctity of these images.⁴¹ As with *kyedun*, blessings are invested incrementally in *kutsab* in order to achieve the highest degree of potency and corresponding efficacy. We could consider this a tendency not only to localize or materialize charisma in objects but also to concentrate it through multiple modes of sanctification. Indeed, descriptions of the origins and benefits of both *kyedun* and *kutsab* imply that the efficacy attributed to sacra mirrors the *degree of sanctity* invested in it. Thus origin accounts of *kutsab* are meant to convince the reader (or listener) of the exceptional potency of its blessings, which in turn serves as the basis for the apotropaic and soteriological benefits promised by sensory contact with it, particularly its claim to liberate through seeing.

As with *kyedun*, the contents of *kutsab* feature the same tendency toward an amalgamation of relics. According to a catalogue in Terdak Lingpa’s corpus, *kutsabs* were fashioned by Padmasambhava from materials gathered by the *ḍākinīs* from celestial domains and sacred places in

⁴¹ I borrow this term from Tambiah 1984:254.

India. This is akin to what Martin calls “relics of geography” or substances sanctified by their association with sacred sites that function as relics when inserted into images and structures (Martin 1994:278). The materials include jewels from the *devas* and *nāgas*, Jambu (river) gold and sands of Lake Mānasarovar, soil from the eight charnel grounds and twenty-four *pīṭhas* in India in addition to fragrances from a tree of paradise, medicinal essences, and various elixirs and extracts (Gter bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:126a.6–126b.1).⁴² Then, into the cavity of these images, Padmasambhava is said to have inserted relics (corporeal and relics of association) from Indian masters considered to be seminal figures for the Nyingma lineage — Garab Dorje, Mañjuśrīmitra, Śrī Siṃha, Vimalamitra among others — such as locks of their hair, clothing fragments, bone relics, practice substances, and his own blood, hair and semen (ibid. vol. 11:126b.2–4). Thus, even before its consecration, the base materials and relics inserted into a *kutsab* have already charged the image with a high degree of potency.

The consecration process further augments the potent blessings instilled in a *kutsab* by relics and other materials. In the following passage, note the way that such an image is said to be blessed, first by celestial figures and then by Padmasambhava himself:

While performing the consecration,
 Countless *vidyādhara*s, *ḍākinī*s and *ḍāka*s
 Gathered like clouds in the sky and blessed [the image].
 The actual body of the Guru [then] into a drop of light
 And dissolved for a moment into the heart of that very *kutsab*.
 Separating [from it] once again, he blessed [the image].
 (Gter bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:126b.4–6)

Strikingly, this passage portrays Padmasambhava's body dissolving into the heart center of the *kutsab* and then reemerging to bless it. Thus, just as *kyedun* pills are identified with the body of Avalokiteśvara, here we can see the various ways that *kutsab* are identified with the body of Padmasambhava. A *kutsab* is molded by his hands (thereby a relic of contact); filled with corporeal relics that include his own; infused with

⁴² Tulku Thondup 1997 provides a translation of this passage in connection with Figure 5 (a photograph of the *kutsab* in question).

his presence by his dissolution into the image; and thereafter blessed by him.

This tendency to amalgamate and concentrate sanctity in images can be found elsewhere in the Buddhist world, though it has a special function in reference to treasure objects. Tambiah emphasizes how multiple factors contribute to the sanctity of Buddha images in a Theravāda context, including the power of the Buddha's realization, the powers attributed to those who make and sacralize images, the efficacy of consecration rituals, and the potency of substance out of which the image is made (Tambiah 1984:203). In the case of *kutsab*, we have just seen the importance given to its base materials and the ritual officiant presiding over the consecration, none other than Padmasambhava himself. Beyond these factors, in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, the deposition of relics is an indispensable part of the sanctification process for images,⁴³ and catalogues of *kutsab* demonstrate the importance of this by listing the names of specific masters whose relics have been inserted into an image. For treasure objects, we could add yet another factor that contributes to the high degree of potency ascribed to them: their concealment from the vagaries of time. Treasure objects are believed to contain particularly potent blessings, because of their association with seminal eighth-century lineage figures and concealment from the degenerative tendency ascribed to historical time in a Buddhist framework.⁴⁴ In describing treasures, both texts and objects, Guru Chöwang calls attention to their enduring benefit as “objects and doctrines that do not deteriorate whatsoever” (*rdzas chos gang yang chud mi za ba*) and Jigme Lingpa heralds the prophylactic effect of concealment: “to prevent the doctrine from disappearing, the teaching from being adulterated, and the power of blessing from disappearing.”⁴⁵ Through their concealment as treasures,

⁴³ In her study on consecration (*rab gnas*) in Tibetan Buddhism, Yael Bentor emphasizes the primacy of the deposition of relics (1996 and 1997). Although the consecration of Buddhist images shares many features with Theravāda contexts studied by Tambiah, Swearer, and Gombrich, another important distinction to be made, as Bentor points out, is the use of a tantric *sādhana* format for the consecration process.

⁴⁴ On Buddhist notions of times, see Nattier 1991.

⁴⁵ See Guru Chos kyi dbang phyug 1979, vol. 2:99.2, and Tulku Thondup 1997:150.

the blessings invested in *kutsab* by Padmasambhava himself are understood to retain their original potency.

The principle of concentrating the maximum degree of sanctity into a single object can be seen most clearly in an origin account in a catalogue revealed by the nineteenth-century tertön Chokgyur Lingpa (Mchog gyur gling pa 1982–86, vol. 29:377–400).⁴⁶ According to this account, Padmasambhava sent out magical emanations to innumerable realms in the ten directions in a flash of light and then gathered back the blessings of all of them into a drop of elixir, using his *vajra* gaze (*rdo rje'i lta stang*) and mental powers (*dgongs pa'i byin*). He then mixed this drop of elixir with a variety of substances from sacred places and charnel grounds, formed this into clay, and invested it with the wisdom and blessing of bodhisattvas in the form of blazing light (ibid. vol. 29:385:4–386:2). In this account, the distillation of Padmasambhava's blessings as a single drop of elixir (Sanskrit: *amṛta*; Tibetan: *bdud rtsi*) is used to sanctify the substances out of which the *kutsab* is made. Moreover, Padmasambhava himself is cast as the “lord who distills the body, speech, mind, quality and action of all the buddhas of the three times” (ibid. vol. 29:385:1).⁴⁷ As such, this *kutsab* is portrayed as highly concentrated, distilling the power and blessings of Padmasambhava, who is himself the distillation of all buddhas.

It is this concentration of sanctity and the saturation of the *kutsab* with the presence of Padmasambhava that allows catalogues to claim that encountering this type of image is equivalent to meeting Padmasambhava in actuality (*dngos su mjal*). This saturation also serves as the basis for its promise to provide “comparable blessings” (*byin rlabs mts-hungs pa*) and the rationale for the list of benefits to be derived from beholding such an image, framed in the first person voice of Padmasambhava as follows:

At this time, [you] meet myself, Padmasambhava;
In the future, [people] will go to see my *kutsab*.

⁴⁶ This text is titled “The Play of Activity: A History of Sacred Substances that Liberate through Tasting and Two Kutsab that Liberate through Seeing” (*Dam rdzas myong grol phrin las rol ba dang/ mthong grol sku tshab rnam gnyis kyi lo rygus*).

⁴⁷ The Tibetan for this reads: *Dus gsum sangs rgyas kun gyi sku gsung thugs/ yon tan phrin las gcig tu 'dus pa'i bdag*.

Whether their merit and fortune are good or bad,
 If individuals make offerings and supplications with faith to these two images
 of me,
 Sickness, demons, sins, obscurations, obstacles, and adversity will be pacified;
 Their life will be glorious with increasing wealth and great enjoyment;
 Harm from hordes of malignant spirits and enemies will be reversed.
 They will complete the two accumulations and attain unsurpassed awakening.
 (Gter dbag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:127b.5-128a.1)

In this passage, seeing a *kutsab* is attributed a range of benefits, including the ultimate goal of buddhahood itself. In terms of its apotropaic promise, *kutsab* are said to pacify sickness, negativity, and obstructing conditions; increase wealth and enjoyment; and reverse harm from malignant spirits and enemies. In addition, there is also a clear soteriological promise: the purification of past evils (*sdig pa*) and obscurations (*sgrib pa*) as well as the two accumulations of merit and wisdom, resulting in “unsurpassed awakening” (*bla med byang chub*).

Significantly, *kutsabs* also promise to transform the place where they are housed, said to be infused with the blessings of Padmasambhava (Mchog gyur gling pa 1982-86, vol. 29:384:2). In a catalogue among Terdak Lingpa's treasures, it states that *kutsabs* create auspiciousness (*bkra shis*) and good fortune (*skal bzang*) for their surroundings. Beyond that, they are said to be hidden by Padmasambhava as treasures in order to reverse plague, famine, conflict, poverty, broken vows, and other downfalls for the Tibetan people during degenerate times (Gter dbag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:127a.5–6.). Since blessings are understood to emanate out from a source, permeating the surroundings of an image and transforming individuals who encounter it, an apt metaphor for the effect of images and other objects containing relics may be radiation.⁴⁸ This metaphor also conveys the spatial and temporal dimensions

⁴⁸ I prefer the metaphor of radiation to contagion, suggested by John Strong in relation to relics (1987:275). Strong uses contagion to describe how a relic is understood to be imbued with the salvific powers of the saint, highlighting how any single part of a saint's body is understood to contain the potency of the whole. However, unlike Frazer's notion of “contagious magic,” whereby magic performed on a single body part (such as hairs, nails, etc.) allows one to affect the individual in question, in the case of relics (and objects containing relics), the charisma of the saint is understood to affect others. As a metaphor, radiation captures this transformative power of

of blessings, which are understood to be highly concentrated in a specific locus and to dissipate across time and space. Indeed, the emphasis on sensory contact with sacra implies at the very least that one must come into close proximity with them in order to garner their blessings.

Regarding their efficacy, we have so far seen the importance of the high degree of sanctity invested in *kyedun* and *kutsab* through their ingredients and special means of consecration. What remains to discern is whether such blessings automatically transform the individuals who encounter such objects or whether this transformation depends on other factors as well. On the one hand, benefits to the individual are articulated within a set of devotional activities with its concomitant logic of accumulating merit. On the other hand, benefits to the surrounding area seem to occur automatically, simply by the fact of a *kutsab* being housed in a particular locale. At stake here is the extent to which apotropaic and soteriological benefits are attributed to *mere* sensory contact with an image and the extent to which they require the appropriate ritual actions. This issue centers upon whether the benefits promised by sensory contact with *kyedun* and *kutsab* are earned through works or received as a gift of grace. As such, this returns us to the question posed at the outset of this article regarding the possibility of salvation through grace in Tibetan Buddhism.

A Question of Grace?

Let us now consider whether what we find here can indeed be considered a notion of grace, and if so, how it might contravene without contradicting the law of karma. So far we have seen that a range of soteriological and apotropaic benefits are claimed for sensory contact with treasure objects considered to be highly charged with blessings and infused with the presence of Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava in multiple ways. The precise nature of soteriological promise varies and includes ensuring a favorable rebirth, thereby sparing beings the sufferings of the lower realms; enabling rebirth in a pure land which

charisma in addition to the way that, at least in Tibetan Buddhist contexts, blessings are understood to permeate the environment where sacra are housed.

offers the ideal conditions to complete the path to buddhahood; and hastening the ultimate goal of buddhahood. Several questions remain: Does the soteriological promise of sensory contact with objects claiming special sanctity, such as *kyedun* and *kutsab*, depend solely on the potency of blessings invested in them through their identification respectively with Avalokiteśvara and Padmasambhava? What role, if any, do the actions and disposition of the individual encountering these objects play in reaping these benefits? To the extent that blessings are understood as a transformative power that can affect an individual's soteriological prospects, how does this square with the law of karma and the overarching emphasis of self-cultivation in Buddhism?

If we revisit the quote that opened this article, we see quite clearly the capacity to contravene the law of karma that is credited to *kyedun* pills. Ingestion of this bodhisattva's emanated flesh is portrayed as capable of securing rebirth into Avalokiteśvara's pure realm despite any and all misdeeds. In the larger passage from which the quote is drawn, *kyedun* is also credited with pacifying suffering, repairing violations to tantric vows, and purifying evil deeds and obscurations as well as a host of apotropaic benefits, such as reversing demons and untimely death, acquiring good health and a radiant physique, and enjoying abundant rainfall and healthy livestock (Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 7:506.1–508.1). However, while *kyedun* is credited with the power to purify past evils and thereby tip the karmic scales, the same is not true where buddhahood itself is concern. *Kyedun* are said to place individuals firmly on the path of deliverance (*thar pa'i lam*) — here in the sense of the ultimate aim of release from saṃsāra — but cannot single-handedly confer it (ibid. vol. 2:679.1).

Significantly, in these accounts, buddhahood itself is never guaranteed, only the opportunity to achieve it. The notion of liberation in seven lifetimes, articulated in some texts about *kyedun*, preserves the integrity of a gradual Buddhist path while nonetheless maintaining the promise of grace. These pills hold out the prospect of buddhahood by promising the ideal conditions for practice either in a pure land or in seven (presumably human) lifetimes. Thus, it does not directly contradict the emphasis in Tibetan Buddhism on a rigorous regime of ethical, contemplative, and intellectual training. But it does nonetheless offer a substitute to earning the necessary merit for a rebirth in which the ideal

conditions for practice are present. Unfortunately, these texts do not make clear how the accumulated merit and spiritual realization of accomplished masters are converted into blessings, nor how those blessings are transferred to the individual via the senses. Whatever the mechanisms may implicitly be, it is clear that they provide a karmic boost sufficient to ensure the proximate salvation of a favorable rebirth and to provide the conditions for the pursuing the ultimate goal of buddhahood in a future lifetime. In light of this, it might be more apt to say that *kyedun* pills are intended to jump start the process of self-cultivation, while at the same time protecting those who ingest them from the suffering of the lower realms.

To the degree that they operate on the karmic balance of an individual's accumulated deeds, the benefits of *kyedun* are reminiscent of cases in Mahāyāna literature, studied by Susanne Mrozik in which she notes the “ethically transformative effects” of seeing, hearing, touching and even tasting the body of a bodhisattva (Mrozik 2004). In one example she analyzes from the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, an animal which eats the flesh of a recently deceased bodhisattva is reborn in a divine abode. However, unlike bodhisattva flesh in the literature surveyed by Mrozik in which the purity of the bodhisattva's vow gives it efficacy, in *kyedun* a favorable rebirth is obtained through the potency of merit and blessings contained in Avalokiteśvara's flesh, mixed with a variety of relics.

In the context of *kyedun* and *kutsab*, there are other mitigating factors that qualify grace. Often the faith and pious activities of individuals are portrayed as enhancing their ability to receive blessings via the senses. While some benefit comes to even the greatest sinners, more typically the main benefit of sensory contact is reserved for the faithful (*dad ldan*). This was reiterated to me in an interview with a cleric-scholar of Mindroling Monastery, who emphasized that individuals receive blessings in proportion to their degree of faith. Khenpo Shipsha stated, “Whether blessings come depends on whether or not one has faith. Those with great faith receive great blessings; those with middling faith receive middling blessings; and those with little faith receive little blessings.” As another qualify factor, he stressed that the efficacy of prayers (*smon lam*) made before an image is determined not only by the potency of the image but also the moral charac-

ter of the individual in accord with the karmic law of cause and effect (*las rgyu 'bras*).⁴⁹

According to some texts, the disposition of different categories of individuals determines the extent of benefit they receive from encountering *kyedun* or *kutsab*. For example, in Terdak Lingpa's treasures, the term "buddhahood without meditation" (*ma bsgoms sangs rgyas*) is qualified in several ways. Some are excluded from its benefits outright, such as heretics (*log pa lta can*) and skeptics (*the tshom yid can*) who are deemed unsuitable vessels (Gter bdag gling pa 1998, vol. 11:131a.3). For those just beginning the Buddhist path, a favorable rebirth is given as the result of direct contact with sacred substances (here notably through the sense of smell) as follows: "A fortunate one at the initial stages of the path, just by smelling such substances in the breeze, will purify evil deeds and obscurations and thereby obtain [a rebirth in] the higher realms" (ibid. vol. 11:131a.2–3).⁵⁰ Even for the advanced, despite the rhetoric of "buddhahood without meditation," it seems that there is still work ahead. The faithful who taste sacred substances in the context of a tantric initiation are purported to purify their karma and obscurations, attain the state of a non-returner (*phyir mi ldog pa*), and quickly attain buddhahood (ibid. vol. 11:130b.6–131a.1). Though given a significant boost, they must still pursue the task of achieving ultimate salvation.

In a history within the treasure corpus of the nineteenth-century tertön, Chokgyur Lingpa, we also see that the benefits derived from

⁴⁹ Interview with Khenpo Shipsha in Lhasa on February 26, 2006. In terms of the moral character of the individual, Khenpo Shipsha mentioned a number of aspects, including the accumulation of merit (*bsod nams bsags pa*), avoidance of evil deeds (*sdig pa spong ba*), performance of virtue (*dge ba sgrub pa*), and a positive attitude (*bsam pa bzang po*). If one does not have a positive attitude and has accumulated many evil deeds, he stated flatly "the blessings of an image will not come to you" (*sku 'dra yi byin rlabs khyed rang la yong gi ma red*). See below for how this statement might be reconciled with grand claims of benefiting even those who have committed one of the five inexpressible sins.

⁵⁰ Interestingly, the sense of smell suggests a lack of intentionality to this moment of contact with *kyedun* by the uninitiated novice.

encountering a *kutsab* are commensurate with the types of offerings made. An excerpt from a long list of benefits in this text must suffice to illustrate this point:

Whoever offers incense to this *kutsab* will have pure conduct and benefit others immeasurably. Whoever offers butter lamps to this *kutsab* obtains clear sense faculties and the eye of wisdom. Whoever offers perfume to this *kutsab* purifies obscurations and clears away illness and demons. Whoever offers food to this *kutsab* enhances *samādhī* and augments their food supply and wealth. Whoever offers music to this *kutsab* will perfect the enlightened mind and achieve renown.... In sum, whoever venerates this *kutsab* with one-pointed faith and devotion will not become destitute; they will be reborn in a noble family and quickly attain enlightenment. In this way, their merit is equivalent to meeting and paying homage to Padmasambhava in person and it ripens commensurately. There is not the slightest bit of difference in blessings and siddhis [received]. (Mchog gyur gling pa 1982-86, vol. 29:388.4–389.4)

In this example, we see the notion of grace fully integrated with the workings of karma and the ritual process of merit-making. The ordinary acts of image veneration — involving a series of sense offerings — are correlated with a range of benefits, including purifying sin, increasing wealth, and gaining wisdom. Here *kutsabs* are envisioned as particularly efficacious objects of worship, such that the merit gained through ritual acts of veneration is equivalent to that of paying homage to Padmasambhava in person. Moreover, the potency of the image, coupled with the disposition of faith, is asserted as a means to quickly attain enlightenment.

Considering these texts about *kyedun* and *kutsab* as a group, what we find could be characterized as a type of qualified grace. To the extent that individuals gain merit through ritual acts of veneration, the result must be considered to be earned. However, this only accounts for an image as a field of merit and not as a repository of power. To the extent that blessings are credited with influence and efficacy, the resulting soteriological benefit could be characterized as grace, since it is free and unearned.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the disposition and capacity of the individual

⁵¹ This is a refinement on a point made by Martin in relation to relics in Tibet as follows: “In the experience of the believer, however, the relics are no more merely passive and unresponsive objects of worship than the living revealers or saints themselves

also play a key role in determining their receptivity to blessings available through sensory contact with sacra. Thus, the workings of grace emerges based on three factors: (1) the potency of blessings that radiates out from a sacred object, (2) the occasion of direct contact with it through the senses, and (3) the receptivity of the individual based on their degree of faith, moral character and spiritual capacity. However, even this must be further qualified.

When considering the soteriological promise of sensory contact with Buddhist sacra, we must also pay close attention to the logic governing the ritual context in which it occurs. *Kyedun* and *kutsab* can be encountered in a variety of settings, including pilgrimage (*gnas skor*), temple visits (*mchod mjal*), public initiations (*khrom dbang*), or an audience with a lama (*mjal kha*).⁵² This suggests that the receipt of blessings occurs within a set of ritual actions already oriented toward the purification of past evils (Tibetan: *sdig pa*, Sanskrit: *pāpa*) and the accumulation of merit (Tibetan: *bsod nams*, Sanskrit: *punya*). In other words, the blessings contained in them are understood to support and expedite the process of self-cultivation rather than supplant it.⁵³

Indeed, the pattern in texts dedicated to one of the four (or six) liberations is to make a grand claim to be a means to “buddhahood without meditation” and then qualify that claim in specific ways. For example, in *Liberation through Hearing in the Intermediate State* (*Bar do thos grol*) in the corpus of Karma Lingpa, while it is called “the

could possibly be. Something palpable is given in return for their veneration, something we might call grace or blessings” (1994:273–74). The distinction I would like to make is that merit is earned in return for acts of veneration; however blessings — while received in the context of devotional activities — are not necessarily “given in return.” Instead, the texts examined in this article suggest that blessings permeate the environment where sacra are present and that the disposition of the individual determines his or her receptivity to them.

⁵² Another important site for several categories within the four (or six) liberations is in connection with death rites. I have already mentioned the use of the *Bar do thos grol* and *btags grol* in this regard. In addition, sacred substances promising to liberate through tasting may be put into the mouth of the dying person.

⁵³ With regard to a pure land orientation, Kapstein has emphasized, “Tibetan religious intelligentsia, even while energetically promulgating faith in Amitābha and the aspiration for rebirth in his realm, could not countenance a conception of salvation by grace alone” (2004:30). His point is that moral effort is also required.

profound instruction which liberates by being seen, liberates by being heard and liberates by being read aloud” without the need for meditation, nonetheless the text recommends itself for daily recitation, memorization, reflection on the meaning, and thorough comprehension (Gyurme Dorje 2006:303).⁵⁴ Moreover, when used in death rites, the degree to which individuals going through the death process and intermediate state have been familiar with meditation practice, the various deities described, and virtuous conduct during their lifetime are all said to determine the efficacy of the text to guide them to liberation.⁵⁵ In the same corpus of revelations, a text on “liberation through wearing” begins by making grand claims regarding the soteriological benefits of wearing a mantra circle (specifically, a circular design containing the mantras of the hundred peaceful and wrathful deities) as follows:

As it confers liberation by wearing, there is no need for spiritual practice.
 As it confers liberation through contact, there is no need for training.
 As it confers liberation through feeling, there is no need for reflection.
 This [mantra circle] confers natural liberation whenever it is encountered.
 (Gyurme Dorje 2006:347–48)⁵⁶

Strikingly, this passage suggests that sensory contact with a set of mantras seemingly obviates the need for rigorous self-cultivation in order to attain liberation. However, after listing the various mantras and their benefits, the text concludes by exhorting the reader to practice virtue, avoid negative actions, read the mantras aloud, contemplate them and thoroughly comprehend them. Thus, despite its promise to liberate merely by wearing, nonetheless a course of ethical conduct, ritual practice and textual study is prescribed. What should be made of this seeming paradox?

⁵⁴ According to the *Bar do thos grol*, seeing and hearing continues after death and into the intermediate state during which time the deceased occupies a mental body.

⁵⁵ This is made explicit throughout Gyurme Dorje 2006:219–303; see especially pp. 270–71 and 300–1. Note that the *Bar do thos grol* advocates instantaneous release from cyclic existence (if one recognizes the various appearances that occur in the *bardo* as the natural radiance of one’s own mind) but also offers guidance for ensuring a favorable rebirth.

⁵⁶ This text is titled “Liberation by Wearing: The Concise Meaning of Natural Liberation of the Psycho-physical Aggregates” (*Btags grol phung po rang grol gyi don bsdus*).

The question really boils down to whether claims to liberate through seeing, hearing, tasting, wearing, etc. are intended to be taken literally or whether they are acclamatory in nature, heralding the special sanctity of a particular text, object, substance, mantra, or structure. Consider, for example, the stock claim to rescue from the lower realms even someone who has committed one of the five inexpiable sins. Are we to imagine that the audiences of these texts (and comparable statements posted at pilgrimage sites) have been overly concerned with the karmic consequences of matricide, patricide, killing an arhat, causing a schism in the saṅgha, or drawing blood from a tathāgata? It would be more plausible to view such statements as a claim to the extraordinary powers and efficacy of the object in question. Additionally, this claim could be viewed as a statement of inclusiveness: offering the prospect of salvation to any and all, no matter what their opportunities for more rigorous spiritual training or their ethical profile of past deeds.⁵⁷

I would suggest that the promise of a short cut (*nye lam*) and an effortless (*'bad med*) means to attain liberation through sensory contact functions as a claim to superlative status among sacra, akin to an advertisement offering the best possible package of benefits.⁵⁸ Given the accompanying rhetoric of the degenerate age (as above, a time when negativity is rampant, suffering is great, and dharma practice is rare), it seems likely that the grand claims of soteriological efficacy are a means to appeal to those for whom more rigorous spiritual training is not possible. As an extension of the logic of devotional activities, claims to liberate through seeing, hearing, tasting, wearing, etc. take the range of benefits possible for encountering Buddhist sacra to its farthest extreme — promising no less that buddhahood itself (though as it turns out only indirectly). To borrow a concept developed by Steven Collins (1998), this is akin to the “spectrum of felicities” offered in Buddhism in which nirvāṇa represents a distant endpoint to the more mundane levels of release from suffering. As is the case with Theravāda, in the Tibetan context, only a small proportion of religious specialists and

⁵⁷ Of course a shift in attitude (such as feelings of repentance) would be required to meet Khenpo Shipsha's criterion for receiving blessings. See note 49 above.

⁵⁸ This is comparable to claims in Mahāyāna *sūtras* which offer the promise of expedient means to salvation. See Studholme 2002.

adepts actually aspire to the ultimate goal of buddhahood, while most people (monastics and laity alike) seek more proximate forms of salvation. In the case of *kyedun* and *kutsab*, we can say that although the rhetoric of “buddhahood without meditation” is employed, what is really being offered is the promise of a favorable rebirth in one of the higher realms or alternatively in a pure land. Thus, in the cases examined here, this soteriology of the senses is situated in the set of devotional practices existing outside the rarified domain of scholarship and esoteric meditation — what Gomez (1996:12) calls “the other sides of Buddhism” and which Kapstein (2004:19) nicely summarizes for the Tibetan context as merit-making, contrition of sins, purposeful rituals, devotion, and prayer.⁵⁹ Of course, only future studies made on a case by case basis will allow us to ascertain to what extent the conclusions drawn here apply to other categories of sacra.

Interchangeability of the Senses

Let us conclude by returning to the role of the senses. In the texts surveyed here, the importance of direct contact with sacra is highlighted, rather than the sensory faculty through which such contact is made. Indeed, one need not taste *kyedun* nor see a *kutsab* in order to benefit from the potent blessing contained therein. For example, Chokgyur Lingpa recommends that fragments of a *kutsab* can be used to consecrate other images. This suggests that due to their special sanctity, *kutsabs* can function as relics to be inserted into other images, just as *kyedun* can supply the relics for producing new batches of pills. Moreover, *kyedun* pills can also function as relics when inserted into images or *stūpas*.⁶⁰ The same is true for mantras, *dhāraṇī*, and texts that prom-

⁵⁹ There are important ways that devotional activities (as well as death rites) intersect with esoteric meditative practices — the *Bar do thos grol* being a case in point. Similarly, a public initiation (*khrom dbang*), attended by crowds of thousands as a blessing, blurs any cut and dry distinction between devotional activity and a tantric regime involving preliminary practices (*sngon 'gro*) and the subsequent performance of the *sādhana* of a particular deity.

⁶⁰ For example, *kyedun* and other sacred substances (*dam rdzas*) were inserted into the central image of Padmasabhava in order to consecrate Pema Lingpa's temple, Tamzhing, built in the Chökhör Valley in what is present-day Bhutan. Among the items

ise to “liberate through wearing” (*btags grol*), which may be placed in a *stūpa* or alternatively inside the large cylinder of a “circumambulatory temple” (*skor khang*) which is spun by pilgrims while reciting prayers. In these cases, sensory contact is made with the structure containing texts, substances and images infused with blessings rather than with the objects themselves. Moreover, while *kutsabs* are said to liberate through seeing, we do not find a well-defined notion of “seeing” evident in relation to them, comparable to *darśan* in the Hindu context of image veneration.⁶¹ Indeed, the Tibetan term used for visiting a place of worship (*mchod mjal*) combines the terms for “offering” (*mchod*) and “meeting” (*mjal*) in its honorific form, rather than making a reference to seeing or any other sense. Moreover, for Tibetans, one of the quintessential gestures when visiting a Buddhist temple is to touch one’s head at the base of images and/or to rub a rosary (or other object) on a part of the central image in order to garner its blessings. This suggests that what is most fundamental is contact itself, which may be made through any one of the senses.

One could argue, in fact, that the senses are deemed to be interchangeable. In texts dedicated to one or another of the four (or six) liberations, one frequently finds inclusive statements whereby encountering the same object through more than one of the senses is credited with a comparable soteriological effect. For example, in Karma Lingpa’s corpus, in describing liberation through wearing a mantra circle, it is said that one can wear the mantra circle, hear the mantras pronounced, see (or read) the mantras, or touch the mantra circle as well as recollect and recite the mantras contained therein (Gyurme

listed by Pema Lingpa are a statue of Vajrasattva extracted from Naring Drak; the yellow scrolls (*shog ser*) for texts from the *Dgongs pa kun ’dus* and *Bla ma nor bu rgya mtsho*; pieces of Padmasambhava’s monastic robes; effluvia from Padmasambhava and Yeshe Tsogyal, including their red and white *bodhicitta* (code for sexual fluids); relic pearls (*ring bsrel*) from Mañjuśrimitra; soil from the eight charnel grounds of India; a tress of hair belonging to Princess Pemasel; religious medicine (*chos sman*), *amṛta*, and *kyedun*; an image of the Buddha; various jewels, grains, and other sacred substances (Padma gling pa 1975, vol. 14:288–89). On the inclusion of *kyedun* in *stūpas*, see Martin 1994 and Bogin (unpublished paper).

⁶¹ On the centrality of “seeing and being seen” to image veneration in Hindu contexts, see Eck 1996.

Dorje 2006:348–79). Any of these modes of encounter is equally efficacious, and no hierarchy of the senses is given. The same is also true for the six mini-tantras that liberate through wearing in the *Nyingthik Yabzhi*, which also contain references to liberation through seeing, hearing, and touching.⁶² Regarding *kutsab*, moreover, whether one sees, hears, recollects or touches such an image, it is said to be equivalent to meeting Padmasambhava in person.⁶³ This type of inclusiveness seems less true for liberation through tasting, where the other senses are downplayed (as in the opening quote of this article) and where smell clearly plays a secondary role if mentioned at all.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, inclusive statements can be found.⁶⁵

Through this preliminary exploration of a soteriology of the senses in Tibetan Buddhism, it seems reasonable to surmise that the role of specific sense faculties may be less important than the act of sensory contact with saints and objects containing their relics. Indeed, direct contact with accomplished masters is surely one of the cornerstones of popular religiosity in Tibetan Buddhism. In sparsely populated areas in Tibet and neighboring regions such as Bhutan, thousands have often gathered for a public initiation and thronged the presiding lama to receive a blessing by having the top of the head touched by his or her

⁶² The six short tantras dedicated to “liberation through wearing” (*btags grol*) are contained in the *Nyingthik Yabzhi*, a collection of esoteric instructions associated with Dzogchen or the “great perfection” (*rdzogs chen*). Though these tantras are meant to be worn, they also promise liberation through seeing, hearing, and touching the tantra in question. See *Btags grol gyi rgyud drug* in Klong chen pa 1975, vol. 10:16–25, for example 20.1.

⁶³ See Mchog gyur gling pa 1982–86, vol. 29:386.5–387.1, quoted above, p. 477–78. Though the text does not specify how one is supposed to hear an image, this does not fall outside the domain of what is possible for Buddhist images in Tibet. Indeed, there are images classified as “one [from whom] speech has arisen” (*gsung byon ma*). For example, Mindroling Monastery has a mural of Padmasambhava that is classed as such, referred to as: *Gu ru snang srid zil gnong gsung byon ma byin can*. See Shes bya and Dam chos bstan ’dzin 200?.

⁶⁴ For example, though tasting is considered most efficacious, Sodokpa nonetheless suggests that even by touching, seeing, smelling, or otherwise sensing (*ishor ba*) *kyedun*, the gates to an unfortunate migration are closed (*ngan ’gro’i sgo gcod*) and one will be born as a practitioner of secret tantra (*gsang sngags spyod par skye*). Sog bzlog pa 1975, vol. 2:455.5.

⁶⁵ See note 29 above.

hand, called a “hand empowerment” (*phyag dbang*). It is also common for a lama to use a sacred object (such as an image or ritual implement) to bless participants in a ritual by placing it on the crown of the head. This type of sensory contact is a means to forge a connection (*’brel ba*) with accomplished masters,⁶⁶ who may be called upon to intervene in various crises including the intermediate state (*bar do*) between this life and the next. Through future studies on the four (or six) liberations and related phenomena, there is much to be learned about the function of charisma in Tibet and the role of the senses in Buddhist soteriology more generally.

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⁶⁶ For example, when Pema Lingpa conferred a blessing with his hand (*phyag dbang*) to a crowd of two thousand in the region of Lodrak in southern Tibet, his hagiography suggests that a “meaningful connection” (*’brel tshad don dang ldan pa*) was made through seeing, hearing and touching with the hands (Padma gling pa, vol. 14:412.6). Elsewhere, his hagiography lists three means by which a connection (*’brel ba*) is forged with an accomplished master: through a tantric initiation (*dbang*), reading authorization (*lung*) and sacred substances (vol. 14:386.4–5). Notably, his hagiography chronicles a number of large-scale events which entailed the dissemination of various types of religious medicine (*chos sman*), particularly *kyedun*.

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Book Reviews

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«Die Aussagen dieses Buches haben gezeigt, dass das religiöse Denken in der Menschheitsgeschichte viele Phasen durchlaufen und unterschiedliche Vorstellungen hervorgebracht hat». Dieses Zitat aus dem Schlussparagraphen des *Grundrisses der Religionsgeschichte* von Peter Antes fasst retrospektiv dessen Inhalt und Vorgehen auf treffende Weise zusammen.

Inhaltlich nimmt sich der Verfasser vor, auf 157 Seiten die Religionen in Geschichte und Gegenwart kurz zu schildern und zu charakterisieren. Diese eigentlich unmögliche Aufgabe löst er mit knappen Kapiteln, in denen religionskundliches Grundwissen auf höchste Dichte komprimiert wird. Die Informationen sind einerseits aufgrund einer typologischen Klassifizierung (Frühe Kulturen, Stammes- und Naturreligionen, Hochreligionen, Neue religiöse Bewegungen, Diffuse Religion), andererseits aufgrund einer chronologischen Abfolge (von der Vorgeschichte bis zur zeitgenössischen Welt) angeordnet. Die inhaltliche Ausrichtung vermittelt das Bild von religiösen Traditionen als deutlich abgegrenzte und erkennbare Äußerungen des «religiösen Denkens», das an verschiedenen Orten und zu verschiedenen Zeiten unterschiedliche Ausdrucksformen übernimmt.

Auf der methodischen Ebene wirkt das Buch uneinheitlich. Weder in der Einführung noch durch eigene Lektüre wird dem Lesenden klar, welche Kriterien der Beschreibung der religiösen Symbolsysteme für den Verfasser massgeblich sind. Die religionskundlichen Elemente sind an manchen Stellen stark historisch aufgeführt, an anderen wird von synchronen Themenfeldern ausgegangen. Hilfreich wäre es dabei gewesen, wenn der Autor seinen Zugang zur Religion explizit zur Diskussion gestellt hätte.

Die Stärke des vorliegenden Kompendiums wird auf der didaktischen Ebene angesiedelt. Als Orientierung im Wald der immer umfangreicheren religionsgeschichtlichen Werke kann ein solcher Überblick durchaus Sinn machen. Leser und Leserinnen, die sich zum ersten Mal über die Religionen in der Welt informieren möchten, können anhand einer fortlaufenden Lektüre

einiges erfahren und sich zu weiteren Vertiefungen motivieren lassen. Dabei wirkt der Akzent auf die Vielfalt und Verschiedenheit religiöser Symbolsysteme in Geschichte und Gegenwart als wohltuend gegenüber den zu häufig reproduzierten Stereotypen über «die» Religion.

Obwohl m.E. als wenig geeignet für den Einstieg in eine professionelle Auseinandersetzung mit religiösen Symbolsystemen, kann dieser neue Grundriss der Religionsgeschichte eine zusammenhängende Grundorientierung in einer Zeit des fragmentarischen und schnellen Wissens vermitteln.

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A Chaos of Delight: Science, Religion and Myth and the Shaping of Western Thought. By GEOFFREY P. DOBSON. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005, ix, 478pp., ISBN 1 84553-019-5.

One of the most profound problems in the history of Western thought is charting out exactly how we ended up with our scientific rationality. This relatively innocuous historiographic pursuit quite often raises innumerable hackles, gives rise to acrimonious debates and serves as boundary markers not only for positions, but also for whole disciplines. We have the end result, and we just can't quite figure out the causal chain of events behind it. Usually the causes we conjure up post hoc are shamelessly ethnocentric, triumphalistic and naive. Whether the causes are claimed to have their foundation in the so-called "Greek miracle" or the Protestant ethic or secularization or the Enlightenment, depends entirely upon the particular persuasion of the author. Non-Western cultures, and especially indigenous cultures, have keenly felt the humiliation and pain caused on others by such self-vindicating exercises in the history of scientific rationality. Understanding the relationships between science, the scientific mind and religion can be a key to understanding not only our history but also current world affairs.

The book under review proclaims on its back cover to be "a comprehensive guided tour into the succession of ways human beings have constructed order and meaning about the world, and their place in it." Thus, the main theme of the book is a kind of cultural evolution of meaning-making. It is divided into 12 chapters: after the introductory chapter, chapters 2 and 3 describe Sumerian and Egyptian cosmologies and worldviews. Chapter 4 takes on the Presocratics, chapters 6 and 7 early and Medieval Christendom with brief subchapters on Islamic and Jewish thought, and, after a chapter (chap. 8) on the 'triumphant' rise of Western science, the next three chapters (chaps. 9–11) discuss various aspects of scientific cosmology. The book ends with a brief conclusion (chap. 12).

Looking through the bibliography, it becomes clear that the author's strength resides in the natural sciences. Being an Associate Professor of Physiology and Pharmacology at James Cook University, Townsville, Australia, this is hardly surprising. He is a cardiac specialist. The bibliography lists an interesting collection of books on the history and philosophy of science, whereas the books on religion, even though there are recent titles, especially on Sumeria and Egypt, are outdated. There is not a trace of literature on the theoretical and methodological debates and advances that have been going on in the comparative study of religion for the last twenty years or so. I am generally tolerant of colleagues from outside our field, mainly because I have met

gracious encouragement from colleagues whose disciplines I have trespassed on. In fact, trespassing is what we need in all the sciences, especially between the humanities (including the social sciences) and the natural sciences. This is because many new insights come from cross-fertilization. A good example in the study of religion is the recent interest in cognitive studies. The rise of hybrid disciplines like the cognitive science of religion is extremely important not only for our own field but also for the general public. But it would be arrogant to practice the cognitive science of religion without doing the hard work of learning from contemporary neuroscientists and experimental psychologists. We can only hope that our colleagues outside of our field will soon start reading contemporary scholars of religion rather than (just) Eliade, Smart and Campbell.

There is not much that is new for students of religion in the first seven chapters or so. They are, however, well written and informative, and I am sure that they contain information that the general reader would find interesting. The chapters are illustrated with handy charts and drawings, which professional teachers of religion might find useful. The only chapters that lack such charts and drawings are the chapters on Christianity (chaps. 6–7). The first chapters on Sumerian and Egyptian beliefs not only contain descriptions of their cosmologies but also the archaeological evidence, for instance in the chapter on Sumeria, concerning flood narratives (36–42). Dobson is particularly interested in the ‘scientific’ achievements of these early societies, f.e.ks. their mathematical systems, astronomical systems, engineering achievements and medical ideas. These chapters end with the question “Why ‘natural’ science never appeared” in these locations. The answer, however, is foreseeable: because they lack a “conceptual formulation of more impersonalized relationships among the phenomena” (53, cf. 90, 218).

I found the chapters on the rise of natural science (chaps. 8–11) much more interesting. The chapters on the Presocratics (chap. 4) and on Classical Philosophy (chap. 5) concerning the beginnings of science, also belong to this category. They are written for readers who do not know the fascinating details about the rise of natural science, and the chapters are richly illustrated with helpful diagrams, tables and drawings. For those of us in need of refreshing our knowledge about Kepler’s three laws of motion, Isaac Newton’s four rules of reasoning or what exactly the Big Bang is all about, this book is delightful.

The title of the book is taken from Charles Darwin’s diary. In the 28 February 1832 page, Darwin wrote: “The mind is a chaos of delight, out of which a world of future & more quiet pleasure will arise.” What exactly Darwin meant by that is not discussed in the book, however, Dobson finds the “extraordinary diversity in mythopoeic, religious and scientific thought” (370) described in

his 5,000-year history exhilarating and challenging. In evolutionary terms, this diversity is an expression of the human brain's extraordinary ability "to reflect, create and problem-solve." In their variegated attempts at finding order and harmony in the world through the lenses of various worldviews, human societies find meaning. But this is a double-edged sword because the finding of meaning often carries with it an unwillingness to accept the provisional nature of knowledge. As Dobson argues, "However, from the vantage point of history, certainty (and truth) emerges as a culturally conditioned construct, and not an absolute" (372). Dobson envisions the scientific ideal of challenging the boundaries of our knowledge and thinking, which he claims cannot be done in mythopoeic and authoritarian contexts.

I too share Dobson's enthusiasm for the dazzling beauty of human cultural diversity, but I also abhor the extremes that cultures produce simply by their being human products — the startling ugliness of oppression, irrationality of prejudice and cruelty of pig-headed ignorance. Dobson, of course, is aware of this, but his mission is to help humanity break free of its ignorance and its past (viii). Perhaps Dobson's enthusiasm is a pedagogical ploy. He specifically states that the book is written for a general readership, a kind of guided tour for the general public who "are being left behind" (viii). But he also wants to dismantle dogma and show that the most striking feature of human thought is its uncertainty. It is this kind of message, I believe, that will never reach the very people he is addressing.

Charles Darwin's quote has nothing to do with the bewildering variety of human cultures. He was simply stunned by the Bahia landscape. In fact, in comparing the beauty of the houses, buildings and ships, he was very specific:

But their beauties are as nothing compared to the Vegetation; I believe from what I have seen Humboldts glorious descriptions are & will for ever be unparalleled: but even he with his dark blue skies & the rare union of poetry with science which he so strongly displays when writing on tropical scenery, with all this falls far short of the truth. The delight one experiences in such times bewilders the mind, — if the eye attempts to follow the flight of a gaudy butter-fly, it is arrested by some strange tree or fruit; if watching an insect one forgets it in the stranger flower it is crawling over, — if turning to admire the splendour of the scenery, the individual character of the foreground fixes the attention. The mind is a chaos of delight, out of which a world of future & more quiet pleasure will arise. — I am at present fit only to read Humboldt; he like another Sun illumines everything I behold. — (Darwin's Beagle Diary, 1831–1836, reproduced in *The Complete Work of Charles Darwin Online*, <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>, 2002–2007, p. 115 in Darwin's original pagination)

An argument can be made that Darwin was somewhat of a misanthropist when confronted by the dazzling variety of human cultures. One of his most scathing comments comes in the final paragraphs of *The Descent of Man*:

The main conclusion arrived at in this work, namely that man is descended from some lowly organised form, will, I regret to think, be highly distasteful to many. But there can hardly be a doubt that we are descended from barbarians. The astonishment which I felt on first seeing a party of Fuegians on a wild and broken shore will never be forgotten by me, for the reflection at once rushed into my mind — such were our ancestors. These men were absolutely naked and bedaubed with paint, their long hair was tangled, their mouths frothed with excitement, and their expression was wild, startled, and distrustful. They possessed hardly any arts, and like wild animals lived on what they could catch; they had no government, and were merciless to every one not of their own small tribe. He who has seen a savage in his native land will not feel much shame, if forced to acknowledge that the blood of some more humble creature flows in his veins. For my own part I would as soon be descended from that heroic little monkey, who braved his dreaded enemy in order to save the life of his keeper, or from that old baboon, who descending from the mountains, carried away in triumph his young comrade from a crowd of astonished dogs — as from a savage who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices, practises infanticide without remorse, treats his wives like slaves, knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions. (Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, London: John Murray 1871, p. 946 in the 1913 reprint of the 2nd edition of 1874)

So perhaps the Darwin quote is inappropriate to the Dobson's book. It certainly expresses methodological and philosophical issues that Dobson does not address.

Dobson not only tries to show what science is, but more importantly, as he writes, what science is not (vii). He assumes that science, religion and myth are 'truth-seeking' systems (2). He argues, however, that there are different kinds of truth. Some are verifiable and some are based on consensual norms. Dobson is a positivist:

Modern natural science can be defined as the sociohistoric process of understanding the physical universe and our place in it. The system is built on scientific facts interwoven into conceptual schemes as they relate to perceptible, verifiable (or falsifiable) sense-experience. It is self-correcting and, for the most part, self-perpetuating, with no absolutes; science begins with a question and ends with a question. (12)

Later, he writes that “science deals with relations among physical objects, not super-sensory phenomena” (22). Scientific truth, for Dobson, is:

defined as that relation derived by careful observation and some form of verifiable experimentation, usually involving measurement. The ‘truths’ (or relations) are those observational theory-laden statements as part of the ‘method’ that have been scrutinized and agreed upon by the scientific community. As knowledge advances, the ‘truths’ undergo continual refinement; they may be subtly change or completely abandoned. (18)

This is a fair description of what many scientists think they are doing. Dobson does have a more nuanced understanding as evidenced in the section on methodology (19). He clearly demonstrates a sophisticated falsificationist position, arguing as he does against Popper’s idea of falsification driving science. Falsification and verification, for Dobson, offer no more than evidence against or for a conceptual scheme (19). Modifications are often used to protect a theory, however, they must be stated in such a way that they can be tested. A good example is the discovery of the planet Neptune. In order to explain the behavior of Uranus, which threatened to falsify Newton’s gravitational theory, it was proposed by Leverrier in France and Adams in England in the 19th century that there must be an unknown planet affecting the orbit of Uranus. Astronomers began to search for the planet and found Neptune. The point is that Newton’s theory in this particular case was not saved because an auxiliary hypothesis was falsified, but because it was verified. Quite a number of bold hypotheses have been confirmed in this manner. A more significant problem, which falsificationists cannot solve, is that falsification of a theory on the basis of observation and experiment might very well be the fault of the evidence rather than the theory. This is where philosophers move on to unrepresentative realism which I won’t go into here (cf. A. W. Geertz, “Theory, Definition, and Typology: Reflections on Generalities and Unrepresentative Realism,” *Temenos* 33, 1997, 29–47 and “Definition as Analytical Strategy in the Study of Religion,” *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 25 (3), 1999, 445–475).

I think that Dobson is much too relativistic in his claim, drawing on Popper, that there is no certain way of telling truth from falsehood “that everyone can agree upon” (372). Furthermore, I think he is mistaken in equating religion and science as ways of meaning-making. In my opinion, there is a considerable difference between making sense of life and finding meaning in it. The former is explorative and scientific, the latter is existential and (often-times) religious.

These are all very difficult philosophical problems which even philosophers cannot solve. On these issues, scholars — especially of religion — need to be funambulists in a kind of freestyle slacklining. As my colleague Jeppe Sinding Jensen noted:

[I]t is... necessary to be simultaneously a realist (of sorts) in what concerns our relations to the physical world, an 'anti-realist' in what concerns the relations between language and the world, and a 'symbolic realist' in what concerns the ontology of cultural systems. (*The Study of Religion in a New Key: Theoretical and Philosophical Soundings in the Comparative and General Study of Religion*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2003, 259)

Dobson's book is recommended reading for those interested in the philosophy of science and the problematic relationships between science, religion and myth. It cannot be claimed that he has presented unique answers to the questions he raises, but he has a refreshing take on them.

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The Tibetans. (The Peoples of Asia.) By MATTHEW T. KAPSTEIN. Blackwell Publishing: Cambridge, MA; Oxford (U.K.) 2006, xviii + 384 pages, 44 figures (mostly photographs by the author); 5 maps, ISBN-13: 978-0-631-22574-4. \$29.95/£25.00 (hardcover).

Matthew T. Kapstein's book *The Tibetans* is part of a series that aims to present "a complete history, from the origins to the present, of the people under consideration" (ii). In contrast to the somewhat misleading title that makes one expect a purely ethnographic or anthropological survey that treats "the" Tibetans as a "monolithic entity" (xii), the book offers a well balanced presentation of the many dimensions of Tibet and its inhabitants. The book is addressed to readers with a general interest in Tibetan cultural history. But even advanced scholars may gain new insights. Kapstein, himself a leading tibetologist, addresses also topics of his own ongoing research. The book is very well written and makes extensive use of the latest research outcome. It will without doubt be very valuable for students of Asian history. Only readers with a special interest in the intellectual history of Tibetan religions, Buddhism in particular, may be better off with other introductory works, since merely a short chapter of the book comprises a discussion of religious ideas, rituals and institutions.

The survey sets out with an account of the Tibetan natural environment and the general cultural settings, living conditions and productive activities (1–26). The heading of this introductory chapter, "The vessel and its contents," seems to allude to a traditional Buddhist classification (the "Word of the Vessel," Tibetan *snod-kyi 'jig-rten*, and its animate contents, the living beings, called "juice," *bcud*). This might be taken to illustrate the general fact that Kapstein (as most historians do) adopts the 'emic' historical periodization developed by Tibetan Buddhist scholars and historians for his own presentation of the history of Tibet. This approach is, of course, legitimate, yet, to a certain extent, also problematic, which will be discussed below. Unfolding the history of Tibet in four chapters, the first, "Prehistory and Early Legends", starts with new scientific data of the earliest Tibetan settlements as well as indigenous Tibetan anthropogenic myths (27–50). A second chapter — and, accordingly, a historical period — comprises "The Tsenpo's Imperial Dominion" (51–83); a third is characterized by "Fragmentation and Hegemonic Power" (84–126), whereas a fourth is devoted to "The Rule of the Dalai Lamas" (127–174). The concluding chapter, "Tibet in the Modern World" (269–300), rounds up the historical section of the book. In between the historical outline and the conclusion, three further chapters introduce the reader to issues of the "Tibetan Society" (175–204), "Religious Life and

Thought” (205–243), and to Tibetan art and science, “The Sites of Knowledge” (244–268). As the structure of the book shows Kapstein’s presentation follows the idea of a regional “Tibetan civilizational sphere” (xii); its single periods, however, are distinguished by the respective ruling powers. The book steers clear of earlier academic attempts to describe Buddhism, or, more general, religion as the leading force ruling Tibetan history. Instead it focuses on economic and political circumstances and interests. In Kapstein’s words: “It is one of the unfortunate illusions of Tibetan history that religious tension has too often been taken as the cause, rather than as a symptomatic ideological projection, of the underlying fissures that have often afflicted Tibetan society” (128). This guiding stance, an effect of the deconstruction of ‘Tibet-myth’ in the 1990’s, can be found in other recent publications as well (just to give one example: Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz, *Kleine Geschichte Tibets*, Munich 2006). By using this approach the author is able to offer a convincing explanation of the impact an Inner-Asian economic crisis in 9th century had on the breakdown of the early Tibetan empire. The same perspective leads to a very intense and realistic, yet sad account of the factors that contributed to the internal Tibetan crisis after the death of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and the downfall of the regent Reting Rinpoche. It “brought to light the extreme fragility of the Tibetan state: its political leadership was corrupt and riven by faction, its military suited only for small-scale operations directed against fellow Tibetans, its great monasteries home to militant bands dedicated to refusing reform” (278–279). Those factors paved the way for the occupation of Tibet by the Chinese Army in 1950.

To return to the aforementioned difficulty with regard to the periodization of Tibetan history: Unfortunately some of the major events are only accessible through descriptions of Tibetan Buddhist historiographers. Obviously these texts often follow certain political or religious agendas. There is ample evidence that for central historical events like the narratives of the debate of Samye or the assassination of Langdarma (79–81), the only *factum brutum* is the intention behind the narration. What further complicates matters is that these narratives serve as turning points for the historiography of the traditional Tibetan authors. Nevertheless Kapstein proves to be quite optimistic (much more than the present reviewer) that the modern historian can get a grip on the historical events of Tibetan history by separating strongly biased or fictional accounts from supposedly underlying facts. Since in most of the disputed narratives Kapstein refers to the ongoing academic discussion, this is only meant to be a minor point of criticism. As the author admits (cf. xiii), two dimensions of “the Tibetans” did — unfortunately — not find entry into the book. First, there are only few remarks on the current situation of the

Tibetans of the “Autonomous Region”, and even less can be found on the Tibetan exile communities in India, Nepal or the West. The same holds true of the recent ‘globalization’ of Tibetan Buddhist culture. Though I share the author’s view that there are excellent books on this available. In any case, it would have been a further advantage of this introduction to include new findings on recent developments of present-day Tibetan culture. For example, the major ongoing crisis that divides the Tibetan exile community, namely, the conflict that emerged with the suppression of the controversial cult of Dorje Shugden, is one of those important aspects not dealt with in the book.

In sum, this accessible book makes the latest research on Tibetan history and culture widely available and can be recommended as a standard introduction to the field.

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Books Received

- Brasher, Brenda E., and Lee Quinby (Eds.), *Gender and Apocalyptic Desire*. Series: Millennialism and Society, vol. 1 — London, Oakville, Equinox, 2006, xiv + 182 p., £ 15.99, ISBN 1-904768-86-5 (pbk.).
- Chaturvedi, Vinayak, *Peasant Past. History and Memory in Western India* — Berkley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2007, xxii + 307 p., \$ 55, ISBN 978-0-520-25078-9 (pbk.).
- Connolly, Peter, *A Student's Guide to the History and Philosophy of Yoga* — London, Oakville, Equinox, 2007, x + 266 p., £ 14.99, ISBN 978-1-84553-156-0 (pbk.).
- Dubuisson, Daniel, *Twentieth Century Mythologies*. Second edition, augmented and revised. Translated by Martha Cunningham — London, Oakville, Equinox, 2006, xxii + 314 p., £ 17.99, ISBN 1-84553-021-7 (pbk.).
- Evans, Mark, *Open Up the Doors. Music in the Modern Church* — London, Oakville, Equinox, 2006, xiv + 209 p., £ 15, ISBN 978-1-84553-187-4 (pbk.).
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- Hinnells, John R. (Ed.), *Religious Reconstruction in the South Asian Diasporas. From One Generation to Another*. Series: Migration, Minorities and Citizenship — New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007, x + 335 p., £ 55, ISBN 978-0-333-77401-4 (hb.).
- Johnson, Paul Christopher, *Diaspora Conversions. Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* — Berkley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 2007, xii + 330 p., £ 14.95, ISBN 978-0-520-24970-7 (pbk.).
- Kapashi, Vinod, *Nava Smara a. Nine Sacred Recitations of Jainism* — Hindi Granth Karyalay, Mumbai, 2007, 230 p., Rs. 800, ISBN 978-81-88769-05-6 (hb.).

- Kippenberg, Hans G., and Tilman Seidensticker (Eds.), *The 9/11 Handbook*. Annotated Translation and Interpretation of the Attackers Spiritual Manual — London, Oakville, Equinox, 2006, viii + 111 p., £ 12.99, ISBN 978-1-84553-129-4 (pbk.).
- McCutcheon, Russell T., *Religion and Domestication of Dissent. Or How to Live in a Less than Perfect Nation*. Series: Religion in Culture: Studies in Social Contest and Construction — London, Oakville, Equinox, 2005, xiv + 123 p., £ 14.99, ISBN 1-84553-001-2 (pbk.).
- Nissimi, Hilda, *The Crypto-Jewish Mashhadis. The Shapping of Religious and Communal Identity in their Journey from Iran to New York* — Brighton, Portland, Sussex Academic Press, 2007, xvi + 180 p., \$ 67.50, ISBN 1-84519-160-9 (hb.).
- Reid-Bowen, Paul, *Goddess as Nature. Towards a Philosophical Theology* — Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, viii + 200 p., £ 50, ISBN 978-0-7546-5627-2 (hb.).
- Piepkke, Joachim G. (Hrsg.), *Kultur und Religion in der Begegnung mit dem Fremden* — Nettetal, Steyler Verlag, 2007, 207 p., ISBN 0558-4884 (pbk.).
- Pippin, Andrew (Ed.), *Defining Islam. A Reader*. Series: Critical Categories in the Study of Religion — London, Oakville, Equinox, 2007, xiv + 388 p., £ 16.99, ISBN 978-1-84553-060-0 (pbk.).
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- Shri Hari Mandir and the Glory of Hindu Temples*. Compiled by Pooja Taparia & Bhavit Mehta. Designed by Bhavit Mehta — Sandipani Vidyaniketan, Gujarat, 247 p., £ 25, (hb.).

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